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Thesis

EARLY AMERICAN DRAMA

By

Thomas Edward Clayborne  
(Ph.B., Holy Cross, 1932)

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

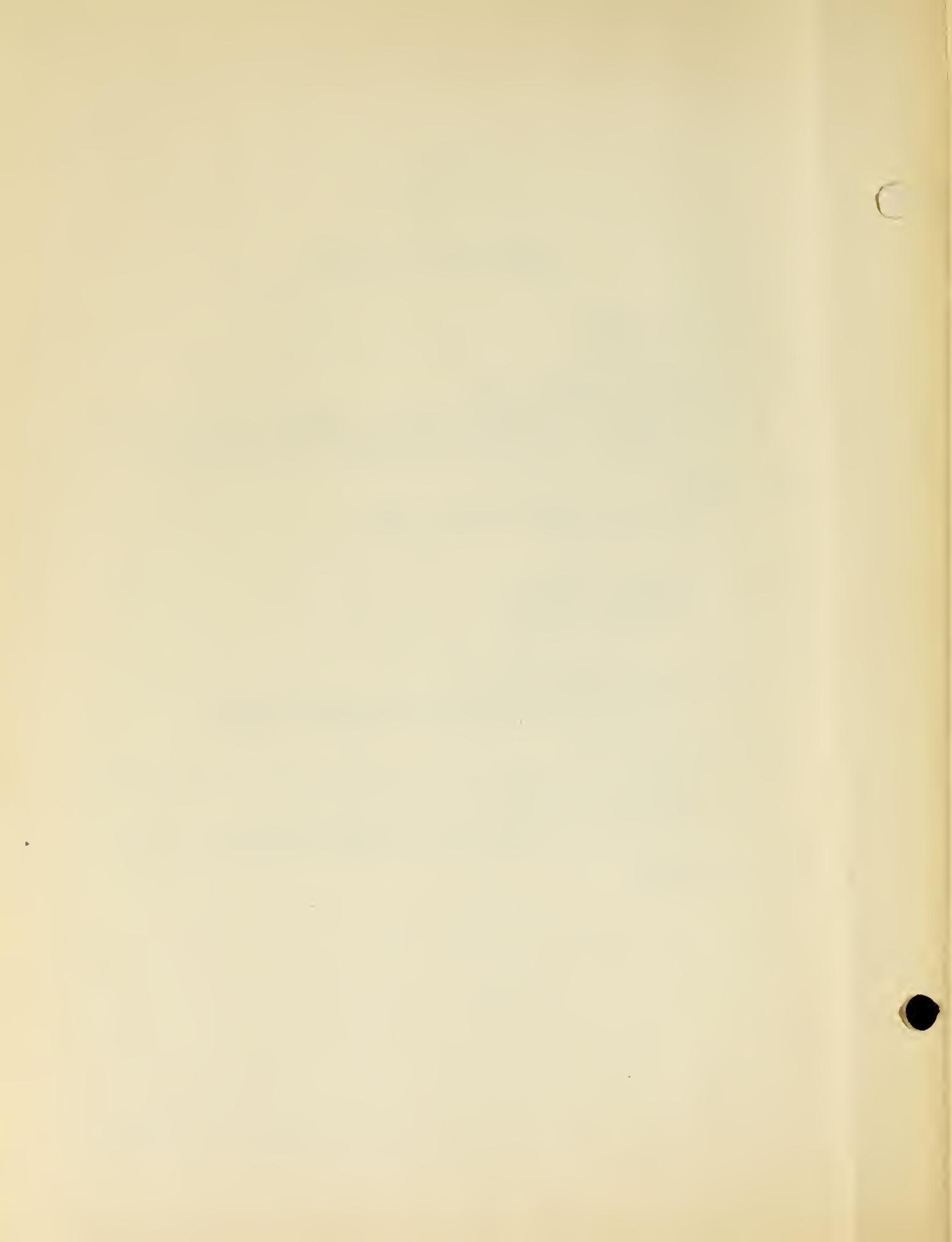
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Outline  
of  
Early American Drama

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### Introduction

There has been, in the histories of our literature, one notable omission, namely, the failure to treat the drama. This condition has arisen for the most part from the rarity of printed plays. Many stage successes have been kept from publication by the producing manager who feared for his property rights. At the present time, however, conditions in this regard, are much better than in the earlier days of drama. The old plays are being brought forth from hiding and the universities are beginning to recognize the importance of obtaining specimens of our dramatic literature. The most significant of our dramas are becoming more accessible in printed collections, but there still remains much to be done before a complete body of dramatic material is generally available to the student. However, with the attainable material we will endeavor to paint a picture of the American Drama, from the beginning up to the period of the Civil War, taking into consideration its chief events, and also its outstanding writers and their works.



CHAPTER I

COLONIAL DRAMA

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The Colonial period was nearly over by the time that the first play to be written by a native American and performed by a professional company of actors was presented in 1767, in the Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia. This delay in the coming of drama was due in part, to the literary dependence upon England, but mostly to prejudice against the theatre. The religious tone varied in the different colonies and to this fact is laid the cause of the opposition to the theatre.

The Puritans of New England, the Huguenots of New York and the Quakers of Philadelphia were inhospitable to the theatre. On the other hand, the Episcopalians of Virginia and South Carolina, and the Catholics of Maryland welcomed the travelling companies of actors. That the Catholics and Episcopalians should be favorable towards the theatre seems natural, however, since drama originated in the ritual of the Catholic church, and English drama reached its peak under the guidance of the Episcopalian church.

Although it is generally thought that the prevailing religious tone in the different colonies caused the opposition to the theatre, the reasons "were deeper and were temperamental rather than theological, and were woven out of the social and economic constitution of the people."<sup>1</sup>

The Puritans and the Quakers had no use whatever for the theatre. They considered it to be associated with monarchical

1. Arthur H. Quinn, *A History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War*, p.1



forms in politics as well as religion. However, expense also had something to do with their feelings towards the theatre. Together with the Dutch burghers of New York they were "averse to providing a livelihood for profane shows."<sup>1</sup>

In 1754 when Governor Hunter of Pennsylvania gave Hallam's company permission to act, he made it clear that nothing should be performed which would violate, in any way, the laws of decency or morality. The reputation of being connected with loose living, which descended from Restoration times hurt the theatre most in New England and Philadelphia, for it was during this time that many of the ancestors of the colonists left England. There is no doubt that the standard of morals relating to the theatrical profession had risen considerably between the reigns of Charles II and George II, but there was still room for improvement. The changes in marital relations of leading men and women show that the standards of that life were not the ordinary ones.

The standards of right living may not have been any lower in Virginia or in South Carolina than in New England but it is a well known fact that the Southern colonies were more favorable toward forms of entertainment than were the New England colonies. In the South the social constitution provided rather liberally for public amusement. The Southerners regarded entertainment as a necessary part of life and they were unable to see why the theatre was illegitimate.

When one takes into consideration all the difficulties

1. Quinn, p.2



which the theatre was forced to combat he can readily see why it was handicapped in its development. As a matter of fact, it is a wonder that it survived at all. However, in spite of all the opposition to the theatre, there was, in these early days, a real appreciation of good acting in this country. This is shown, not only by the stand taken by the Southern colonies, but also by that taken by the friends of the playhouse in Philadelphia and New York. The following statement bears out this fact. "A large portion of the inhabitants, however, saw no offence to morality or religion in any of the colours which diversify and beautify the works of creation; or any of these innocent amusements which bring men together to sympathize in joys or sorrows, uniting them in the same feelings and expressions, with a brotherly consciousness of the same nature and origin."<sup>1</sup>

Thus we see that during the Colonial period in America there was much wrangling as to whether or not the playhouse was legitimate. Both sides were equally certain that their views were correct, and each was unwilling to concede victory to the other. And as a result no definite conclusion in regard to the matter could be reached.

Having looked into the social standing of the theatre during the Colonial period, our next concern will be with that which is claimed by many to have been the first professional company of actors in America; namely, the company brought over from England by Lewis Hallam in 1752.



In the year 1750, William Hallam, a London actor, began to entertain the idea of organizing a completely equipped company of players and sending it to America. He was aided in his plan by his brother, Lewis Hallam, a leading actor in comedy plays. The organization and equipping of the company was soon begun. The members of the company with whom we are chiefly concerned were William Hallam, Lewis Hallam, Mrs. Hallam, the wife of Lewis, and Lewis Hallam Jr. An agreement was reached to the effect that Lewis should take the company to America, while William remained in London and looked after that end of the business. Profits, after expenses had been deducted, were to be divided between Lewis and William.

The company, consisting of Lewis Hallam, his wife, ten other adults, and three of the Hallam children, Lewis Jr., Adam, and a daughter, sailed from England on a ship called the Charming Sally. Lewis was the head of the company, and was to play the comedy parts. His wife was to be the leading lady. The voyage across the Atlantic took six weeks. On their way they were busily rehearsing plays. The plays in their repertory were those then most popular on the London stage. Such men as Shakespeare, Farquhar, Rowe, Gibber, Vanbrugh, Garrick, and Fielding contributed to it. They reached Yorktown, Virginia in June, 1752, and went immediately to the capitol at Williamsburg, where they made application with Governor Dinwiddie for permission to act.

Having received this permission, their next task was to



find a place in which to act. Fortunately there was a building which had been built a short while before for a company which had been playing in Williamsburg. The Hallams hired it and fitted it up for their own use. It was a plain wooden structure, standing so near the edge of the woods on the outskirts of Williamsburg that the manager could stand in the doorway of the theatre and shoot pigeons for his dinner.

The theatre opened on the fifth of September, 1752. The performance on this first night consisted of Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice" and farce called "Lothe."

A memorable feature of this night's performance is that it gave occasion for the first composition connected with the drama which was written for, or addressed particularly to, an American audience. This composition was a prologue especially composed for the purpose by Mr. Singleton. It was spoken by Mr. Rigby. There is a disagreement between Dunlap and Hornblow as to the correct prologue. We will therefore, give the two of them, for these lines since they were the first such to be addressed to an American audience are worthy of record. They are as follows:

"To this New World, from Tam'd Britannia's shre,  
Through boist'rous seas where foaming billows roar,  
The Muse, who Britons charm'd for many an age,  
Now sends here servants forth to tread your stage:  
Britain's own race, though far removed, to show  
Patterns of every virtue they should know.



Though gloom, minds through ignorance may rail,  
Yet bold examples strike where languid precepts fail,  
The world's a stage where mankind act their parts;  
The stage a world to show their various arts;  
While the soul touch'd by Nature's tenderest laws,  
Has all her passions rous'd in virtue's cause.  
  
Reason we hear, and coolly may approve,  
But all's inactive till the passions move.  
  
Such is the human mind, so weak, so frail,  
'Reason's her chart, but passion is her gale.'  
  
Then raise the vale to waft fair virtue o'er  
The sea of life where reason points the shore.  
  
But ah! let reason guide the course along,  
Lest passion listening to some siren's song  
Rush on the rocks of vice, where all is lost,  
And shipwreck'd virtue renders up the ghost.  
  
Too oft, we own, the stage with dangerous art,  
In wanton scenes has play'd the siren's part.  
Yet if the muse, unfaithful to her trust,  
Has sometimes stray'd from what is pure and just,  
Has she not oft with awful, virtuous rage,  
Struck home at vice, and nobly trod the stage?  
Made tyrants weep, the conscious murderer stand  
And drop the dagger from his trembling hand?  
Then, as you treat a favourite fair's mistake,  
Pray spare her foibles for her virtue's sake.



And while her chaste scenes are made appear  
(For none but such will find admittance here)  
The muse's friends, we hope, will join our cause,  
And crown our best endeavors with applause."<sup>1</sup>

"O for the tuneful Voice of Eloquence,  
whose Numbers flow with Harmony and Sense,  
That I may soar above the common wing,  
In lively strains the grateful Subjects sing;  
To celebrate the laurel'd Poets Fame,  
And thro' the world the Stage's Use proclaim.  
To charm the Fancy, and delight the Soul,  
To deal Instruction, without harsh Controul,  
To Cultivate (by pleasing Arts) the Mind,  
To win the Reason, and with wit refin'd  
To check each Error and reform Mankind.  
For this the Bard, on Athen's Infant Stage,  
At first produc'd the Drama's artful Page;  
At once to please and Satyrize he knew,  
And all his Characters from Nature drew;  
without Restriction then, as Nature taught,  
The player acted, and the Poet wrote:  
The Tragic Muse did honour to the State,  
And in a Mirrour taught them to be great;  
The Comick too, by gentle Means reprov'd;  
Lash'd every Vice, and every Vice remov'd:

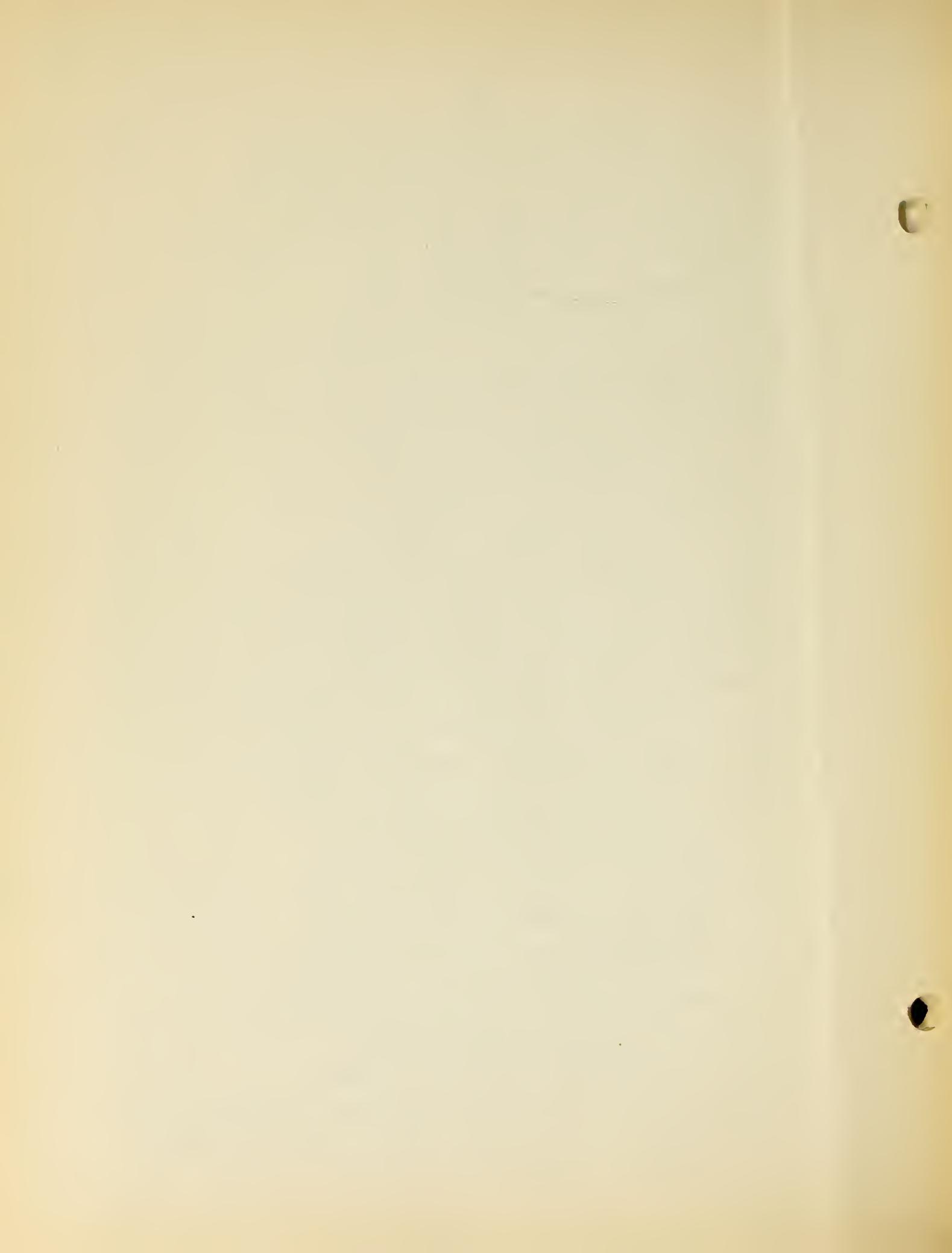


For tho' the Foible, or the crime she blam'd,  
Smil'd on the Man, and with a Smile reclaim'd.  
  
Thus was the Grecian Stage, the Romans too;  
When e'er they wrote, had Virtue in their view:  
  
In this polite age, on British ground,  
The sprightly Scenes, with Wit and Sense abound,  
The brilliant Stage with vast Applause is crown'd  
And Shouts of Joy thro' the whole House resound;  
  
Yet not content to bear so great a Name,  
The Muse still labor'd to encrease her Fame;  
  
Suni'd her Agents quickly to appear,  
Haste to Virginia's Plains, my Sons reapir,  
The Goddess said, Go, confident to find  
An audience sensible, polite and kind,  
We heard and strait obey'd from Britain's shore  
These unknown Climes advent'ring to explore:  
  
For us then, and our Muse, thus low I bend,  
Nor fear to find in each the warmest Friend;  
Each smiling aspect dissipates our Fear,  
We Ne'er can fail of kind Protection here:  
  
The stage is even wisdom's fav'rite Care;  
Accept our Labours then, approve our Pains,  
Your smiles will please as equal to our Gains;  
And as you all esteem the Darling Muse,

The gen'rrous Plaudit you will not refuse."<sup>1</sup>

Another memorable incident of the initial performance was the first appearance on any stage of Lewis Hallam Jr., a boy

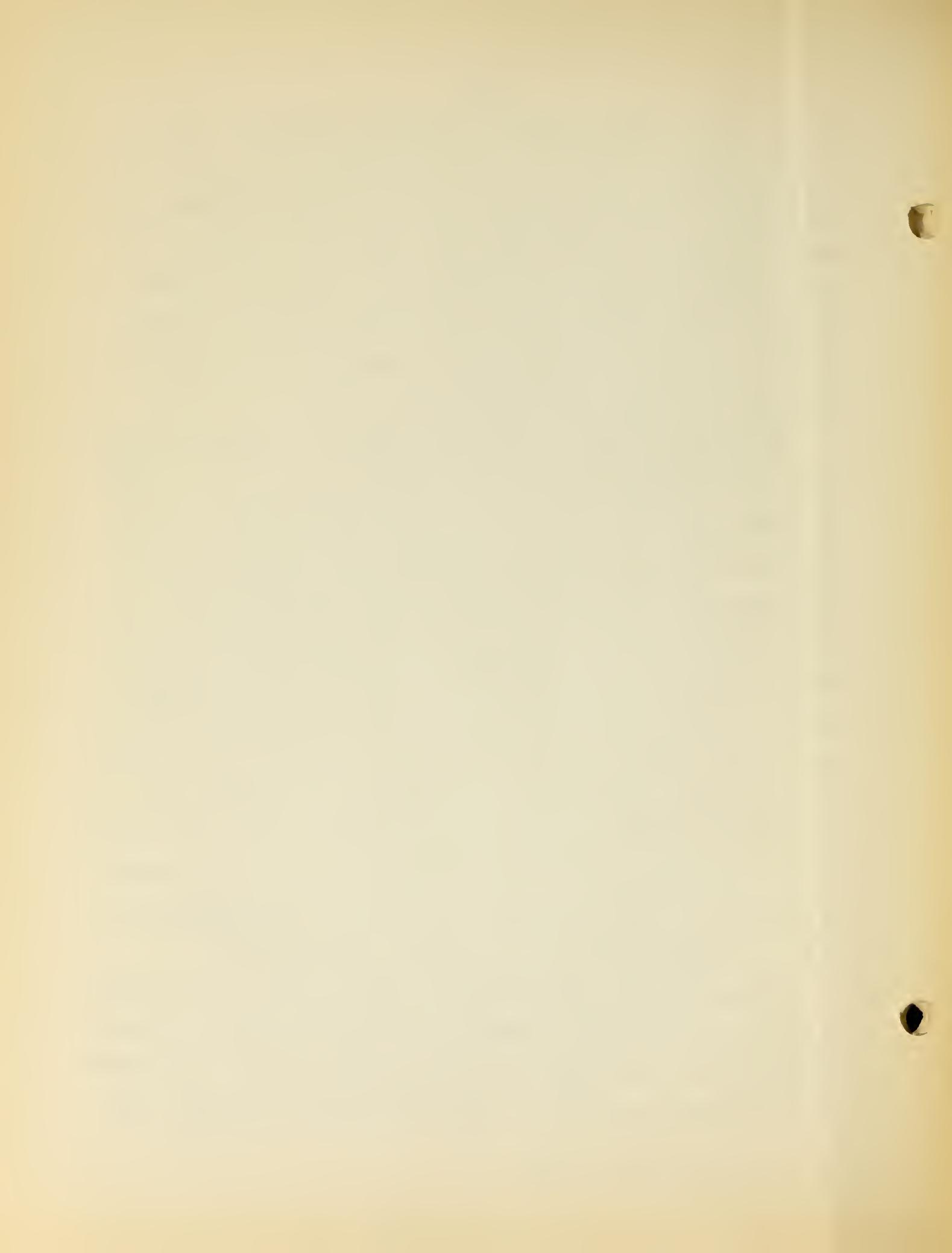
1. Arthur Hornblow, A History of the Theatre in America, Vol. I p.85-86



twelve years of age. He played the part of Portia's servant in "The Merchant of Venice." Although he had but one line to speak, he became stage struck, stood motionless and speechless, burst into tears and walked off the stage without speaking his line. This same stage-frightened boy was destined to become one of the most notable actors in the early American theatre. When his father died he became the leading man and was a great favorite in tragedy and comedy for fifty years.

That which appears to have been the most striking incident of the Hallam company at Williamsburg was the visit of a number of Indian chiefs to the theatre. The Maryland Gazette of November 9, 1782 thus describes the visit. "The Emperor of the Cherokee nation with his Empress and their son, the young prince, attended by several of his warriors and great men and their ladies were received at the Palace by his honor the Governor attended by such of the council as were in town on Tuesday the 9th Instant with all the marks of Courtesy and Friendship, and were that evening entertained at the theatre with the tragedy of "Othello" and a pantomime Performance which gave them great surprise, as did the fighting with the naked Swords on the Stage, which occasioned the Empress to order some about her to go and prevent them from killing one another."

There has been some disagreement as to whether or not "The Hallams" were the first professional actors in America. Dunlap, believing them the first, has called William Hallam, the fosterer of the idea of sending a company of actors to America, "the



father of the American stage."<sup>1</sup> However, Arthur Hornblow, a recent historian has shown that there was professional acting in the colonies before the coming of the Hallams in 1752. He cites the following acts as proof:

- (a) There was a theatre in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1716.
- (b) A theatre opened in New York in 1732.
- (c) A playhouse opened in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1732.
- (d) Thomas Kean acted Richard III at the first Nassau Street Theatre, New York in 1780.

But though Hornblow thus disproves Dunlap's claim of priority for "The Hallams" he bestows upon them the following tribute. William Hallam's name "is to be perpetuated in American theatrical annals as the first theatrical manager who had the courage and ability to organize and equip a company and send it all the way from England to America, an undertaking which in those days <sup>2</sup> was of no mean proportions."

There is no doubt, however, that the coming of "The Hallams" even though they may not have been the first professional actors in the country, is an episode of great importance in the history of the American theatre because the manner of their organization, the extent of their repertory, and the general excellence of the company, marked the first attempt to put the drama in this country on a dignified and permanent footing.

The theatres in which the early plays were acted were flimsy wooden buildings hardly worthy to be called the home of the drama. Consequently, David Douglass determined to build a

1. Dunlap, p.2  
2. Hornblow, p.68



theatre of a more permanent character. As a result of this decision the first permanent theatre in America was erected in Philadelphia, in 1766, on South Street above Fourth. It was called the Southwark Theatre and was constructed of brick and wood. The following description gives us a clear picture of the building. ("The brick-work was rude but strong, and the wooden part of the building rough and primitive. The whole was painted a glaring red. The stage was lighted by plain oil lamps, without glasses, and the view from the boxes was intercepted by large wooden pillars supporting the upper tier and the roof."<sup>1</sup>) It was, however, an improvement on the temporary structures that had previously been erected, and it remained in use for theatrical purposes until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Fire partly destroyed it in 1821. It was rebuilt some time later and was used for many years as a distillery.

The theatre opened in November, 1766, with the performance of the play "The Provoked Husband," and a musical piece "Thomas and Sally." The season was a long one, lasting until July, 1767. The most interesting feature of this long season was the production, on April 24th, of Thomas Godfrey's "The Prince of Parthia." This was the first play written by an American to be produced upon the American stage by a professional company of actors.

Since "The Prince of Parthia" was the first play written by an American to be produced by a professional company of actors on an American stage, I believe that a paper dealing

1. George O. Seilhamer, History of the American Theatre, Vol. I, p.152



with the early American drama would not be complete without giving, at least to some extent, a detailed account of the play.

Before taking the play itself into consideration let us get a glimpse at the life of its author. Thomas Godfrey Jr. was born in Philadelphia, December 4, 1736. He later became a student at the College or Academy of Philadelphia. After college he apprenticed to a watch maker. While at the Academy, Godfrey had come under the influence of Doctor William Smith, the principal of the institution, and through Doctor Smith he received a lieutenancy with the Pennsylvania troops in 1758. He took part in the expedition against Fort Duquesne. In addition to his writing, Godfrey had also musical talents, and a taste for painting. There is not sufficient evidence to prove just what influenced him to become a playwright. It is claimed by some that he was inspired by the work of the American company in Philadelphia; especially by the good work of Douglass. There is, however, no basis for these claims. Godfrey died August 3, 1763, of fever and sunstroke, at the age of 27.

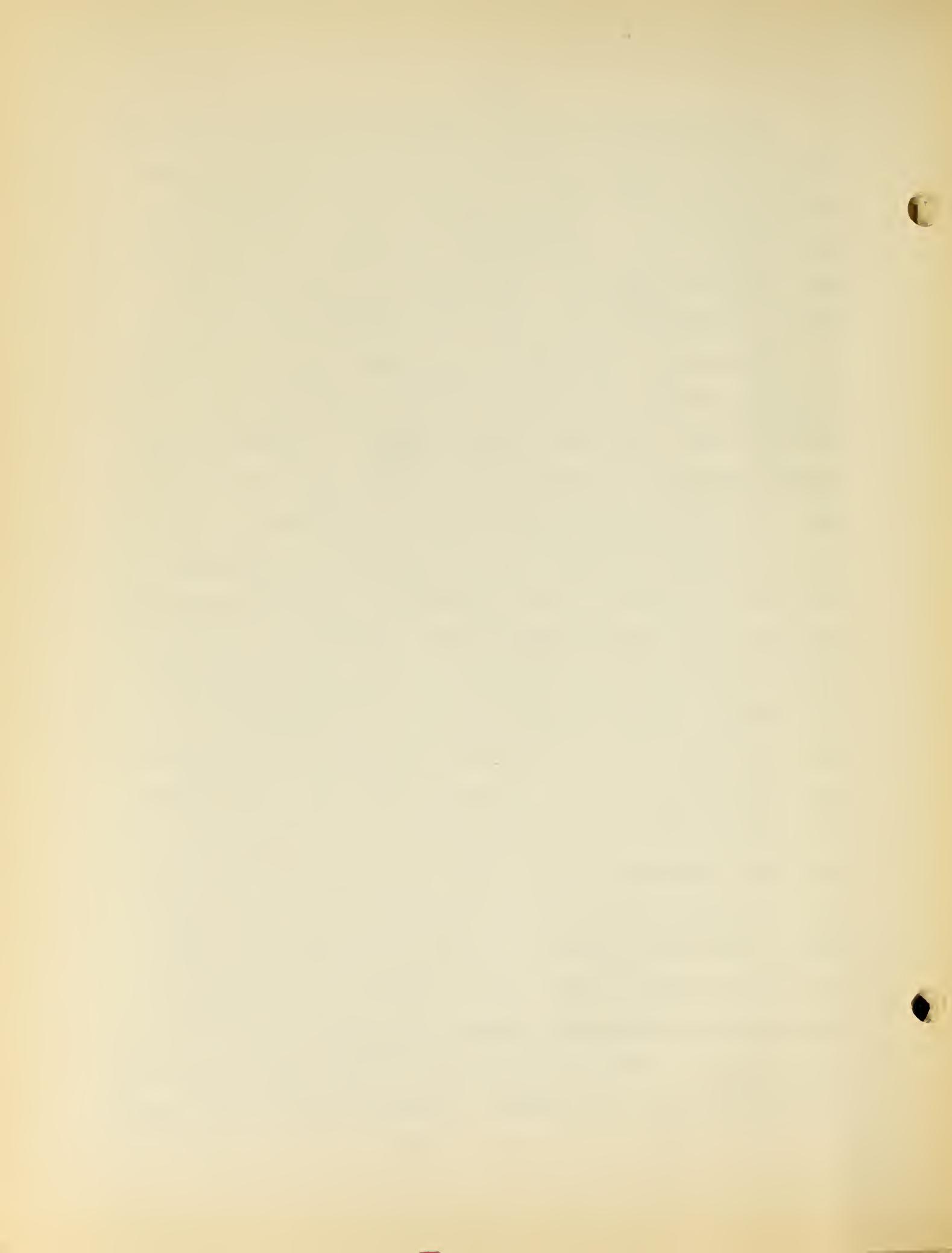
We are now ready for a discussion of the play, "The Prince of Parthia" itself.

Following his death Godfrey's friends, among them Doctor Smith, Nathaniel Evans, a young minister, and John Green, a portrait painter, realizing that he was too much of a genius to have his productions scattered and unrecognized had in 1765, a book published entitled "Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects, with the Prince of Parthia."



In the publication of "The Prince of Parthia" we have the first printed American tragedy in existence, and in its production we have one of only two plays written by Americans, and presented on the stage before the Revolution. The other play is George Cocking's, "The Conquest of Canada or The Siege of Quebec" printed in 1766 and presented in 1773.

"The Prince of Parthia" is a romantic tragedy, the scene of which is laid in Parthia at about the beginning of the Christian era. The story runs as follows: Arsaces, the son of King Artabanus, is returning in triumph after his victory over the Arabians. His general favor incites envy in the heart of his brother, Vardanes, which is aggravated by the success of Arsaces in winning the love of Evanthe, a captive maiden, whom Vardanes loves and who excites also the passion of the king. Vardanes plots with his tool, Lysias, to influence the King's mind against Arsaces by suggesting that Arsaces has designs upon his father's life. Artabanus is easily made suspicious, and when Arsaces asks as a reward for his labors that Evanthe become his bride, the King adds jealousy to his other emotions. The Queen, Thermusa, second wife of Artabanus, hates Arsaces because he has killed her son, Vonones, and she visits him in prison, where the jealousy of the King has sent him, with the intention of killing him. She is prevented from doing so by the apparition of the King who has been murdered by Lysias out of revenge for insults, and also by a softer feeling which suddenly comes to her for Arsaces. Arsaces is freed by his younger



brother Gotarzes who, with troops, enters the city and after a brief skirmish, defeats Vardanes. Vardanes has been making violent love to Evanthe, in the meanwhile, and has been repulsed. By an ancient tragic device, Evanthe does not view the battle scene herself, but depends on the word brought to her by her companion, Cleone. Cleone mistakes Arsaces for another, who is killed and informs Evanthe that Arsaces is dead. Evanthe takes poison and the lovers meet only to say good-by. Arsaces kills himself and Gotarzes reigns to restore order in the kingdom.

The criticism of "The Prince of Parthia" I believe, is adequately taken care of in the two following quotations.

"As an action play it has no merit. There is little plot and practically no action, while the speeches in blank verse  
are long and dull."

"The Prince of Parthia" should not be judged by modern standards. It is an old play and should be considered as such. The tragedy is based upon real human emotion. The passions of love, jealousy, hatred and revenge, the sentiments of loyalty, pity and terror, are fundamental and the main motive of the play shaped from these elements, the love of Arsaces and Evanthe, is naturally interwrought with the motive of self-preservation through the danger to the lives of both. These two motives, love and self-preservation, are the two motives of widest appeal to an audience, and Godfrey, with the instinct of a dramatist selected them for his play. The play is conceived along true tragic lines for while the actual death of

1. Hornblow, Vol. I, p.123

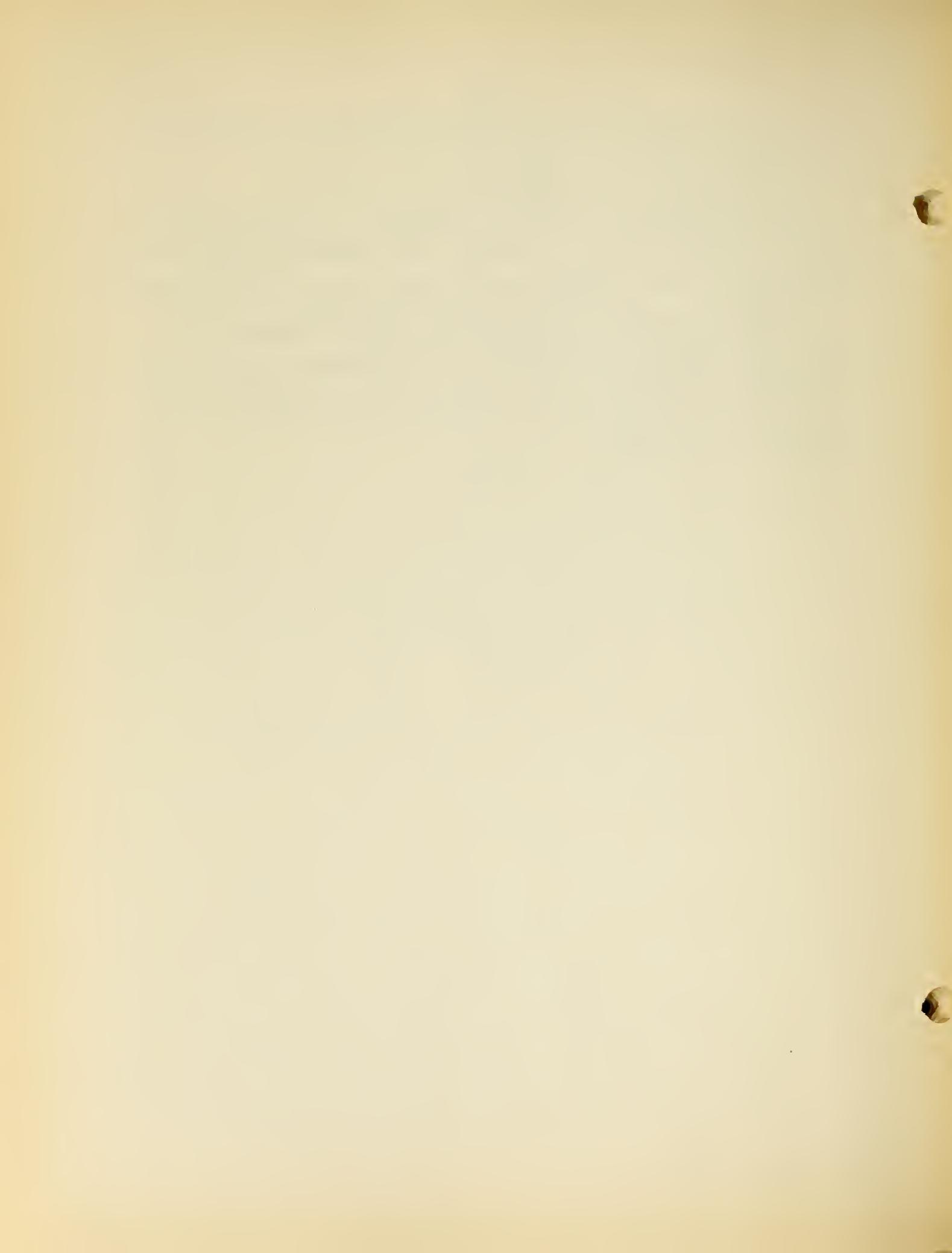


Evanthe is an accident, the failure of the love of hero and heroine is practically inevitable.

The characters of Arsaces, Artabanus, Vardanes, Fhermusa, Evanthe and Bethas are well drawn. The language is dignified, the blank verse is flexible and at times rises to distinction.<sup>1</sup>"

The discussion of "The Prince of Parthia" brings to a close our treatment of the drama of the Colonial period, and we now turn our attention to the drama of the period of the American Revolution.

1. Quinn, p.21-22



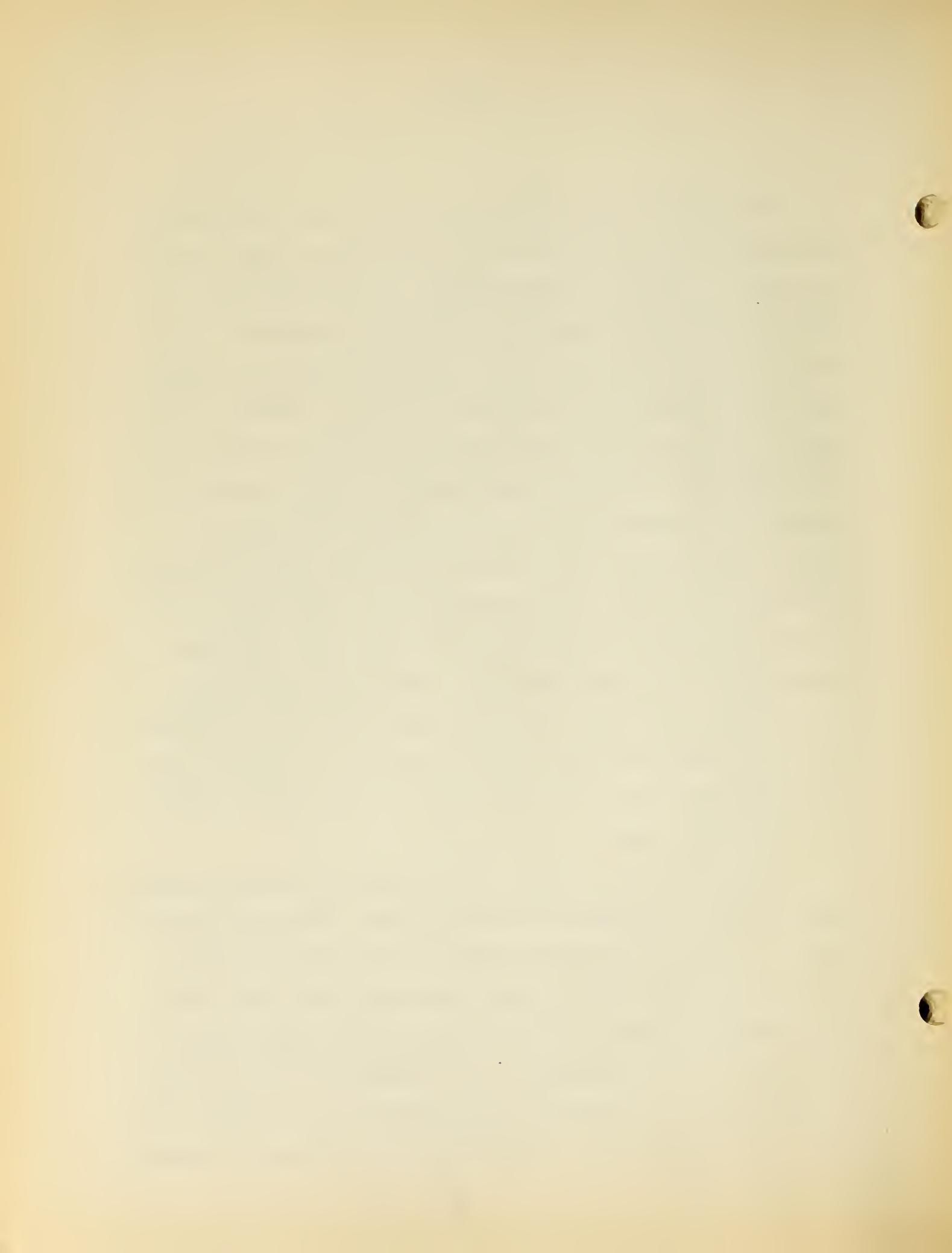
CHAPTER II

DRAMA OF THE REVOLUTION



The approach of the Revolution put a stop to amusements. Relations between the colonies and the mother country became so critical that Continental Congress met in Philadelphia on October 24, 1774 and passed the following resolution. "We will, in our several stations, encourage frugality, economy, and industry, and promote agriculture, arts, and the manufactures of this country, especially that of wool; and will dis-  
contentance and discourage every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse-racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock-fighting, exhibitions of shows, plays, and other  
<sup>1</sup> expensive diversions and entertainments." This resolution merely recommended the suspension of amusements, but four years later a more stringent decree was issued prohibiting play-acting in any form. The fact that the British soldiers, upon whose hands time lay heavily, turned to play-acting for amusement, alone kept the drama alive in the Colonies during the years of the war.

Previous to 1773 it was not customary for American political writers to attempt the dramatic form. There was up until this time very little encouragement to write for the stage. Following the Stamp Act and the Boston Port Bill there was a considerable increase in the feelings of bitterness between the Loyalist and the Royalist. As the time for the outbreak of hostilities approached the people gave vent to their political sentiment, directly, conveniently and effectively through  
l. Quinn, p.32

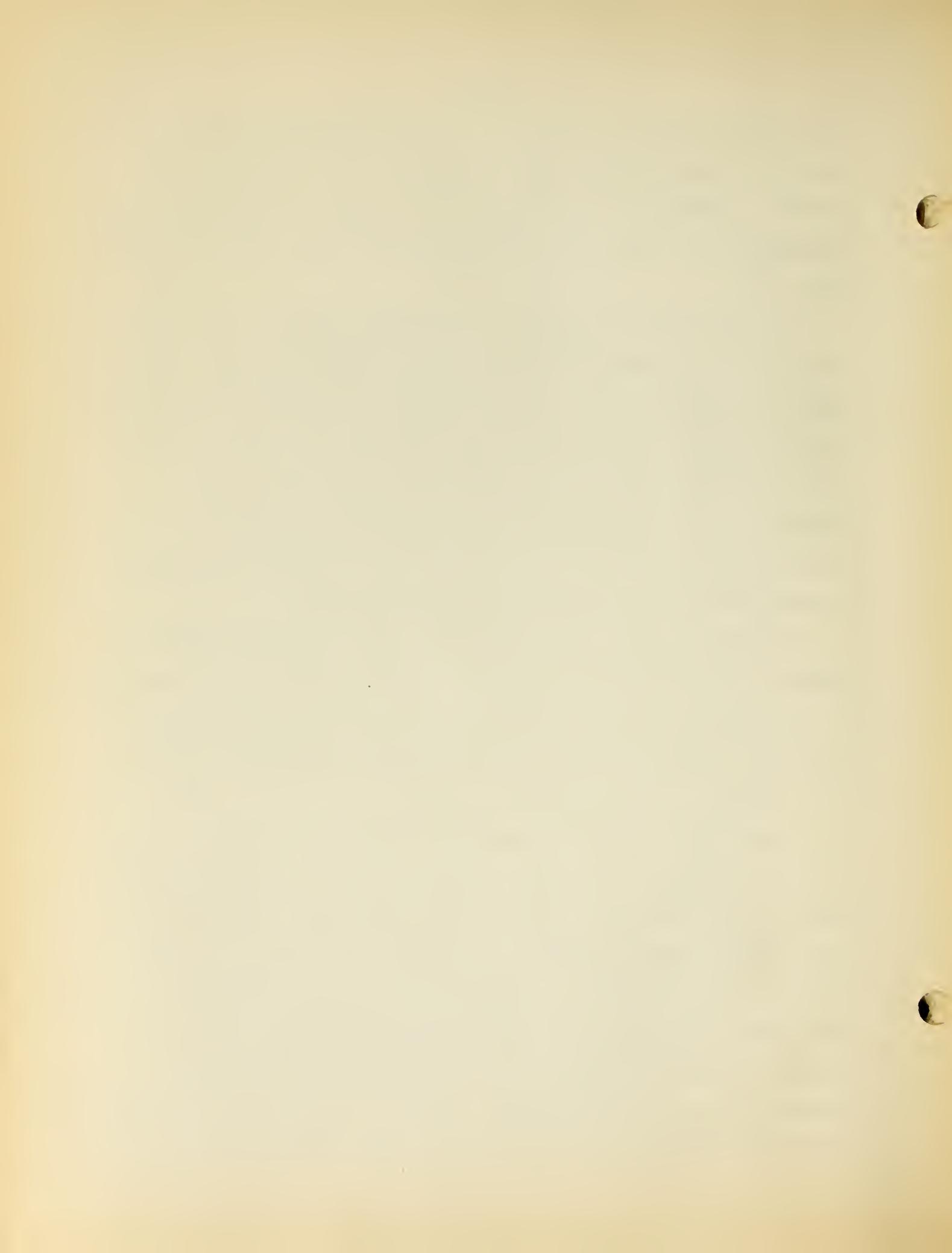


the medium of dramatic satire. The Whigs expressed their patriotism to America and their resentment against the actions of Great Britain and the Tories. The Tories, on the other hand, expressed their hatred of independence and their loyalty to the King.

The drama of the period is well represented by Mrs. Mercy Warren's "The Adulateur" and "The Group;" Brackenridge's "The Battle of Bunker's Hill" and "The Death of General Montgomery;" The Tory satire, "A Cure for the Spleen;" John Leacock's "The Fall of British Tyranny;" and Burgoyne's "The Blockheads." "The Patriots" written by Colonel Munford was a satire on pretended patriots; while the play "Battle of Brooklyn" presented a vulgar cartoon of Washington and his officers.

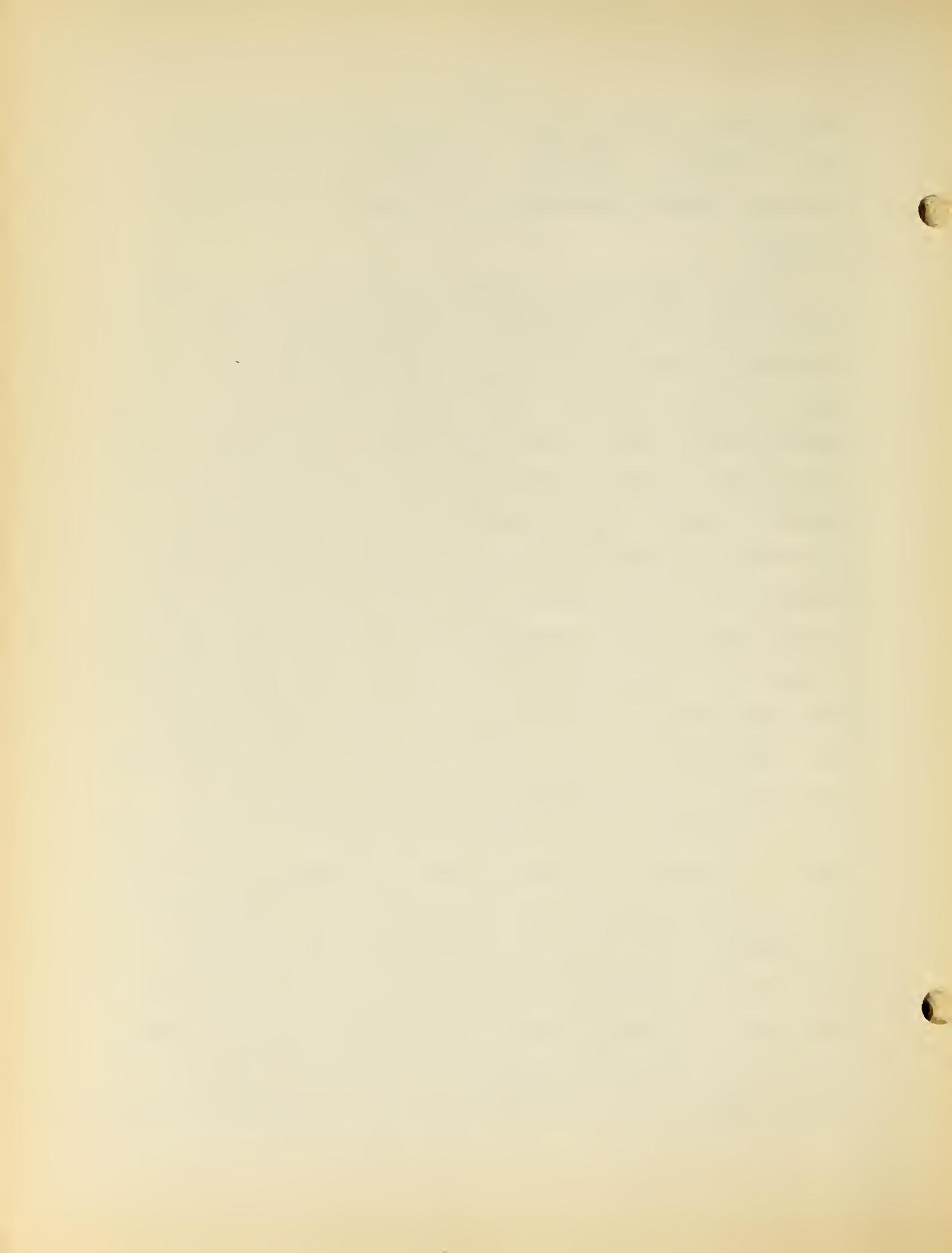
In treating the use of the drama by the Whigs and the Tories, we will discuss the use by each separately. The leader in this satiric political writing was Mrs. Mercy Warren, and because of her importance we will consider her apart from the other writers of the period.

"The Fall of British Tyranny" was written in 1776 by John or Joseph Leacock, one of the elusive figures of early American Drama. Even more elusive is his identification. His name has been spelled Leacock, Lacock and Laycock. To add to the confusion Watson's "Annals of Philadelphia" on the reminiscent word of an old resident of that town, declares that Joseph Leacock penned "The Medley" and also wrote a play with good humour called "British Tyranny." There is no definite information regarding Leacock in the files. "The Colonial Records of



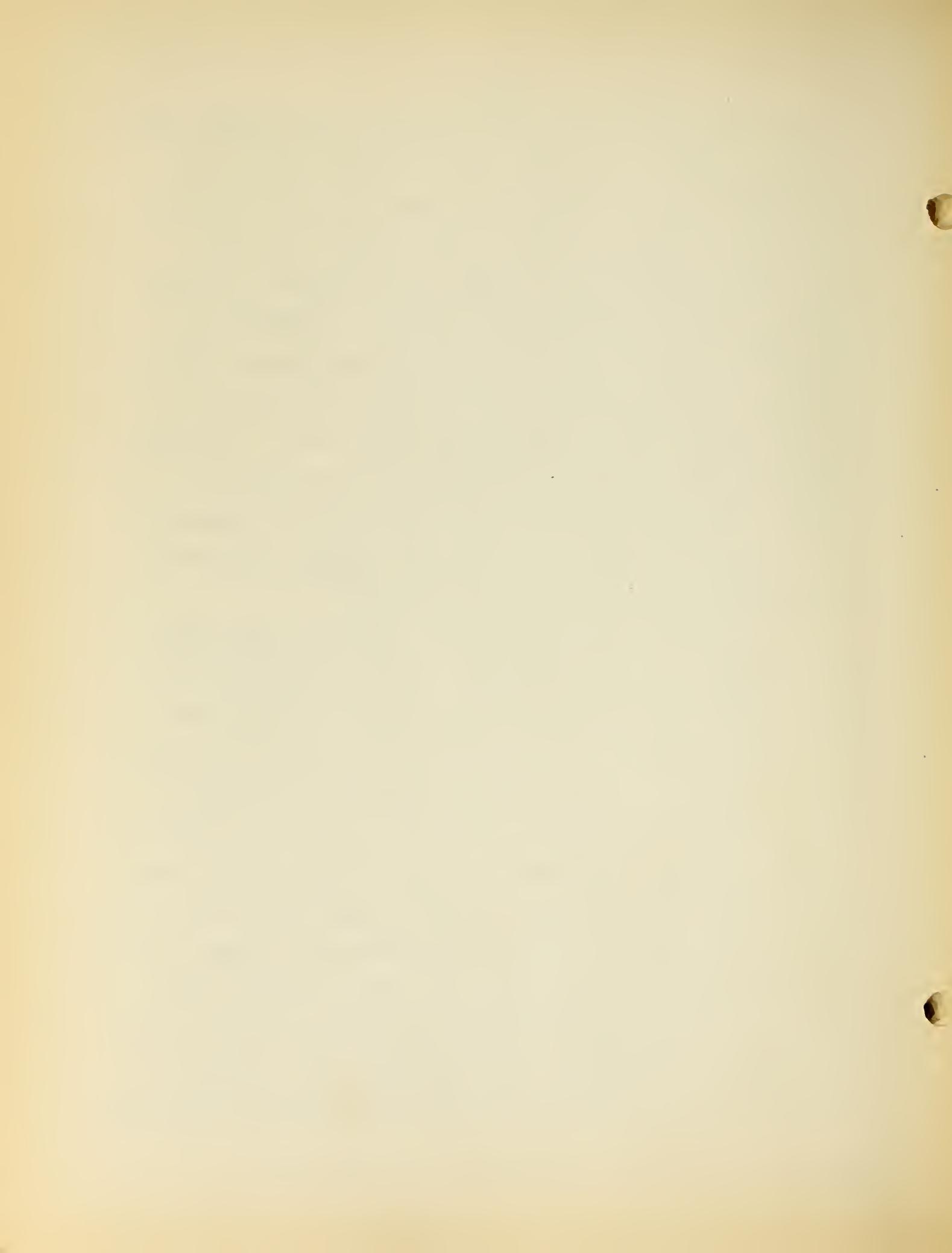
"Pennsylvania" mentions three John Leacocks and a Joseph Leacock all Coroners. "Records of Pennsylvania Soldiers of the Revolution" mentions several John Leacocks and also a John Laycock.

The play "The Fall Of British Tyranny," itself was one of the first, if not the first, chronicle plays in America. The chronicle character of the play is indicated by the wide scope of scene situation. The principal scenes being laid in England, and at Lexington and Bunker Hill. The play was written in prose. Leading English statesmen were introduced under descriptive names. The satire was aimed at specific persons. The verse was somewhat stiff and the satire was to some extent strained, but nevertheless, it was more dramatic and more effective than the pedantic verse of Mrs. Warren and Mr. Brackenridge, two other writers of the period. In the play Leacock gave vivid descriptions of the battles of Lexington and Concord. His characters were fairly well-drawn, and the fact that they did not talk alike showed that Leacock understood the value of contrast in art. Leacock realized that the Revolution began, as Bancroft and Freelyan have since proved, in contests in the English Parliament for place and profit. Consequently he painted a black picture of the British. The following quotation is an example of his bitterness. Washington says, "Finding they cannot conquer us, gladly would they make it up by a voluntary free-will offering of a million of money in bribes, rather than be obliged to relish the thoughts of sac-



rificing their cursed pride and false honor, they sending over to amuse us (to put us off our guard) a score or two of commissioners with sham negotiations in great state, to endeavor to effect, by bribery, deception and chicanery, what they cannot accomplish by force. Perish such wretches! - detested be their schemes! - Perish such monsters! - a reproach to human understanding - their vaunted boasts and threats will vanish like smoke, and be no more than like snow falling on the moist ground, melt in silence, and waste away. - Blasted, forever blasted be the hand of the villainous traitor that receives their gold upon such terms - may he become leprous, like Naaman, the Syrian, yea, rather like Gehaze, the servant of Elisha that it may stick to him forever."

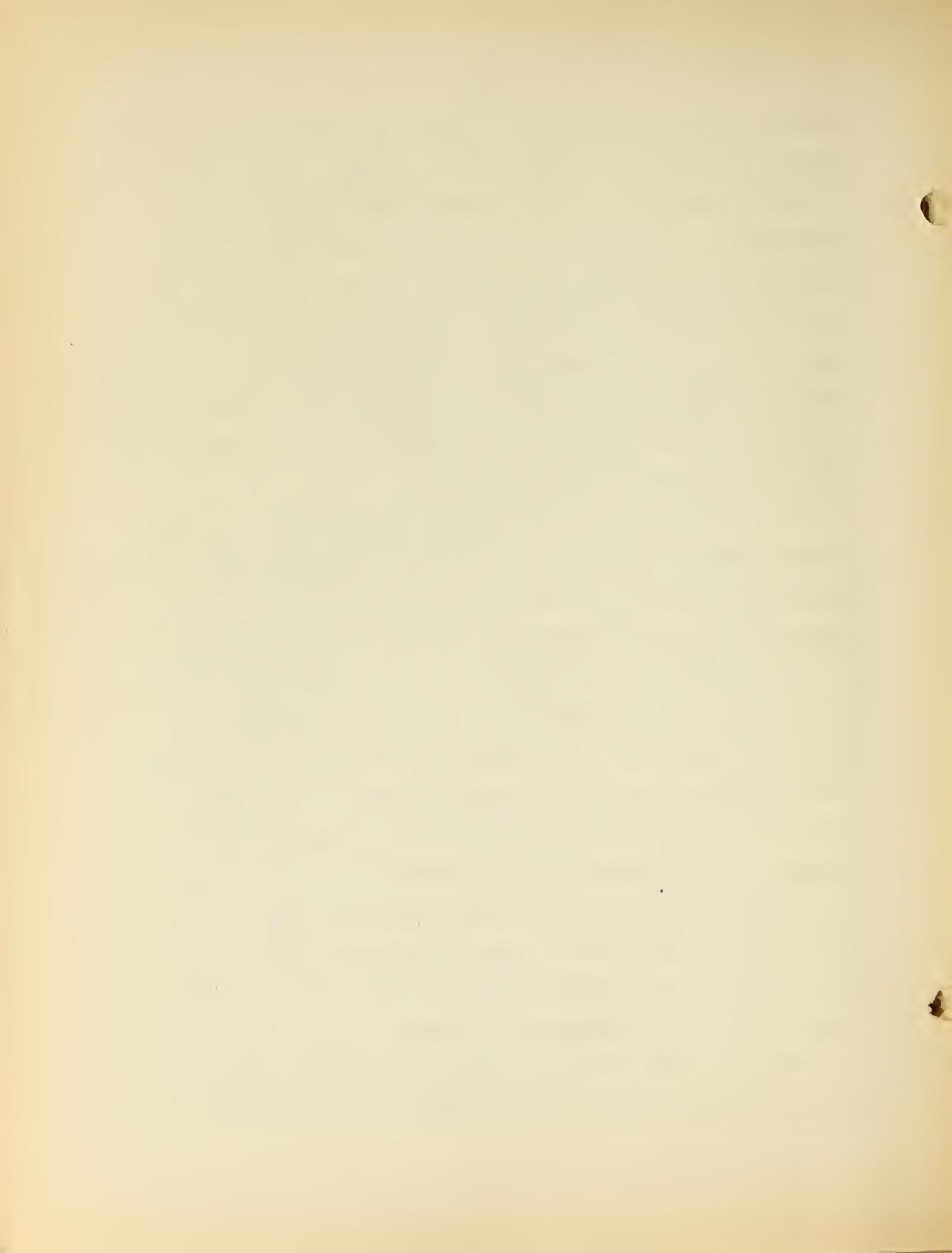
"The Battle of Bunker's Hill" was written by Hugh Henry Brackenridge in 1776. Brackenridge was born in Campbeltown, Scotland in 1748. His early life was spent in Pennsylvania. His father was poor, and his schooling was garnered under precarious conditions. At the age of fifteen he was engaged as a school teacher in Maryland, at Gunpowder Falls. At eighteen he went to President Witherspoon, of the College of New Jersey and arranged to teach classes so that he might remain and study. Among his classmates at college were Madison and Freneau. With Freneau he shared the authorship of a college dialogue, "The Rising Glory of America." Following his graduation he tutored for a while in the college, meantime taking up a course in theology. He later accepted a position as teacher in "Somerset



Academy" on the eastern shore of Maryland. While here he wrote "The Battle of Bunker's Hill" for his students. The play was published anonymously. The year 1776 marks Brackenridge's severance from teaching work. He edited the "United States Magazine" which afforded him a means of airing his patriotic views. In 1777 he enlisted as a chaplain in the Revolutionary Army. Then he took up law and established himself in Pittsburgh where he rapidly grew in reputation through his personal magnetism and his undoubted talents as a lawyer. He was a Judge from 1800 to the time of his death in 1816.

"The Battle of Bunker's Hill," like "The Fall of British Tyranny," was favorable toward the cause of independence. It was neither a poem nor a play. It was dramatic in form only because the characters were made to speak in the first person. The fact that it was Patriotic was its only merit. The sentiment of love of country was well displayed. The action was carried on through the conversation, first between the American leaders, Warren, Putnam, and Gardner; there was no satire here; it was the expression of one great quality, namely, that of courage. Even in looking at the British side and witnessing the deliberations of Gage, and Howe, Burgoyne, Clinton, and Lord Pigot, we note that the tone was serious. The British were presented as not very anxious to fight. The verse was flexible and for the most part dignified.

"The Death of General Montgomery," was written in 1777, another of Brackenridge's plays. Brackenridge was at this



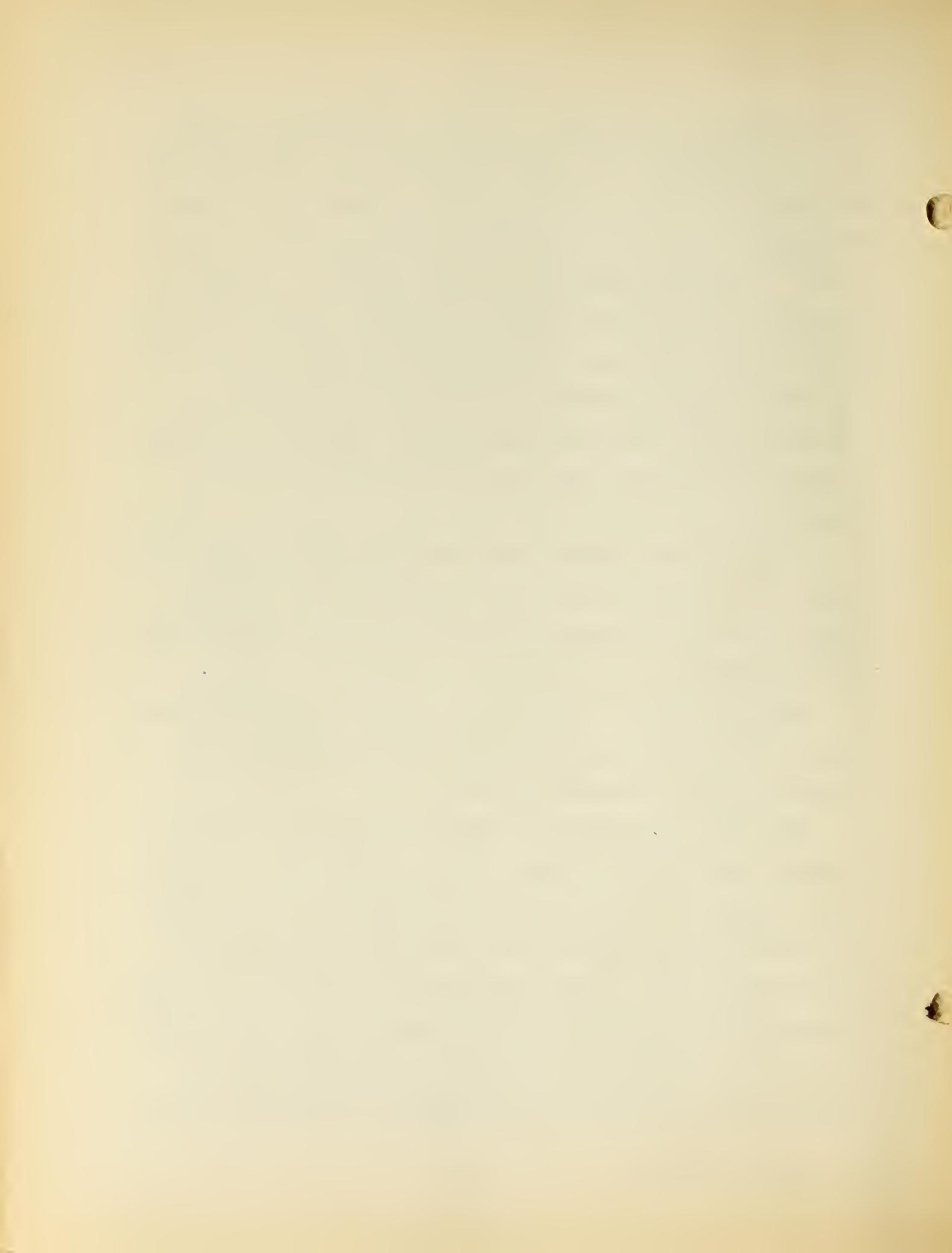
time chaplain in the army. He showed confidence by stating in the introduction that he believed that the publication of the drama might be more helpful to the colonial cause than "hereafter when the foe is entirely repulse<sup>1</sup> and the danger over." The play opened with the explanation of the plan of operation by General Montgomery, to Arnold, in which there was quite an exact description of the circumstances of the attack upon the fortress of Quebec. The death of Montgomery was indicated only in the speech of Aaron Burr. The play ended with a note of bitterness toward General Carleton, the British Commander.

Brackenridge's dramas were superior to other Revolutionary plays in structure and expression, although they lacked the vigor of action of Leacock's play and the sharp satire of Mrs. Warren's plays.

Having looked at the Whig views let us now turn our attention to the other side and see what steps the Tories were taking in satiric political writing.

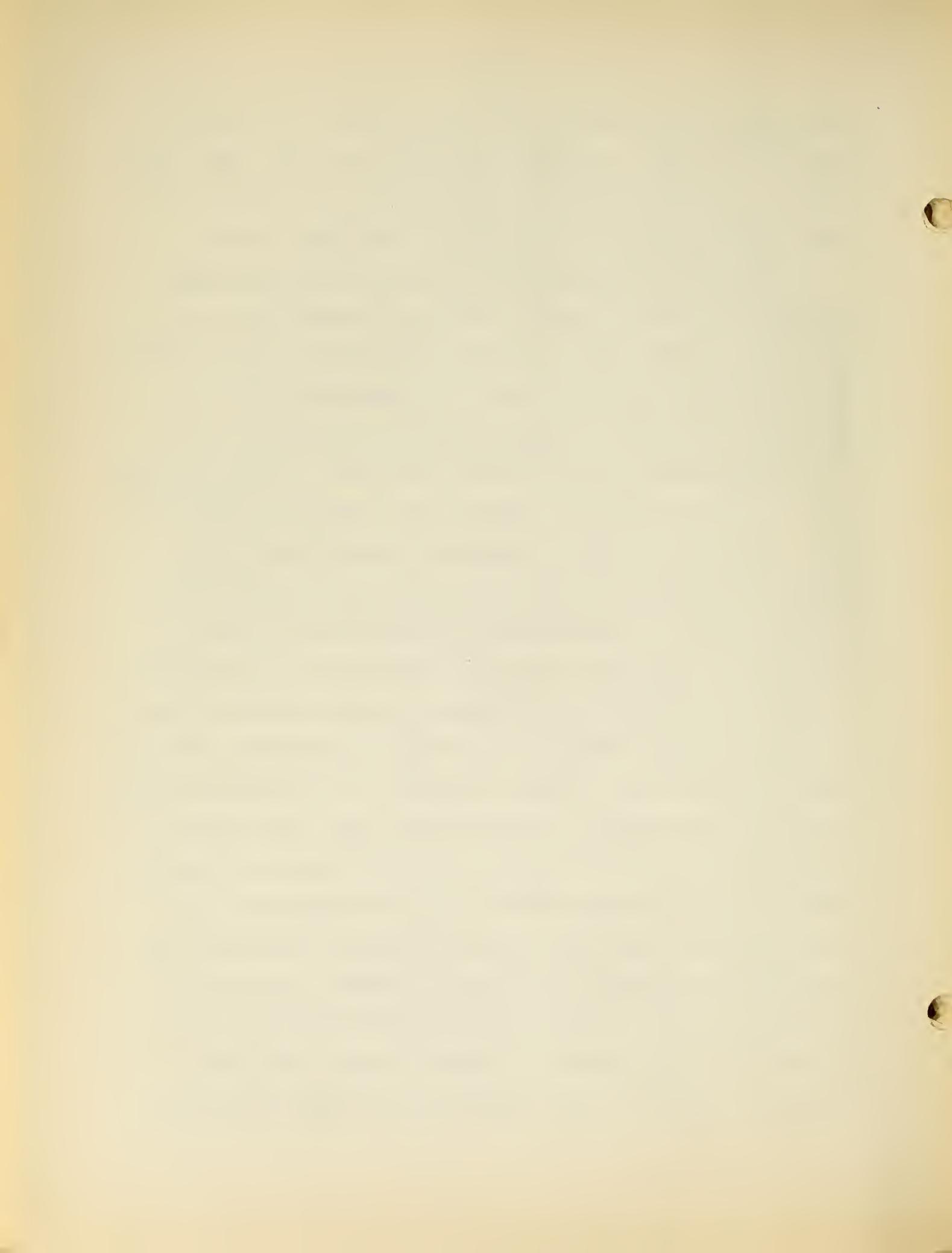
The play "The Battle of Brooklyn" the author of which is unknown, was written in 1776. It gave a Tory view of Continental leaders. The rebel chiefs were made out to be cowards and selfish opportunists, whose smallness of human nature caused them to sink to the lowest depth of meanness. The play represented Washington as being dragged to a low level before his own men, who had little respect for him because they doubted as to his ability and competency. Squabbles between

1. Quinn, page 52.



washington and his officers were common due to the general unrest in the army. Washington was also shown as a hard commander, who ruled his men with an iron hand, and who made it known that since he was the leader he alone gave orders.

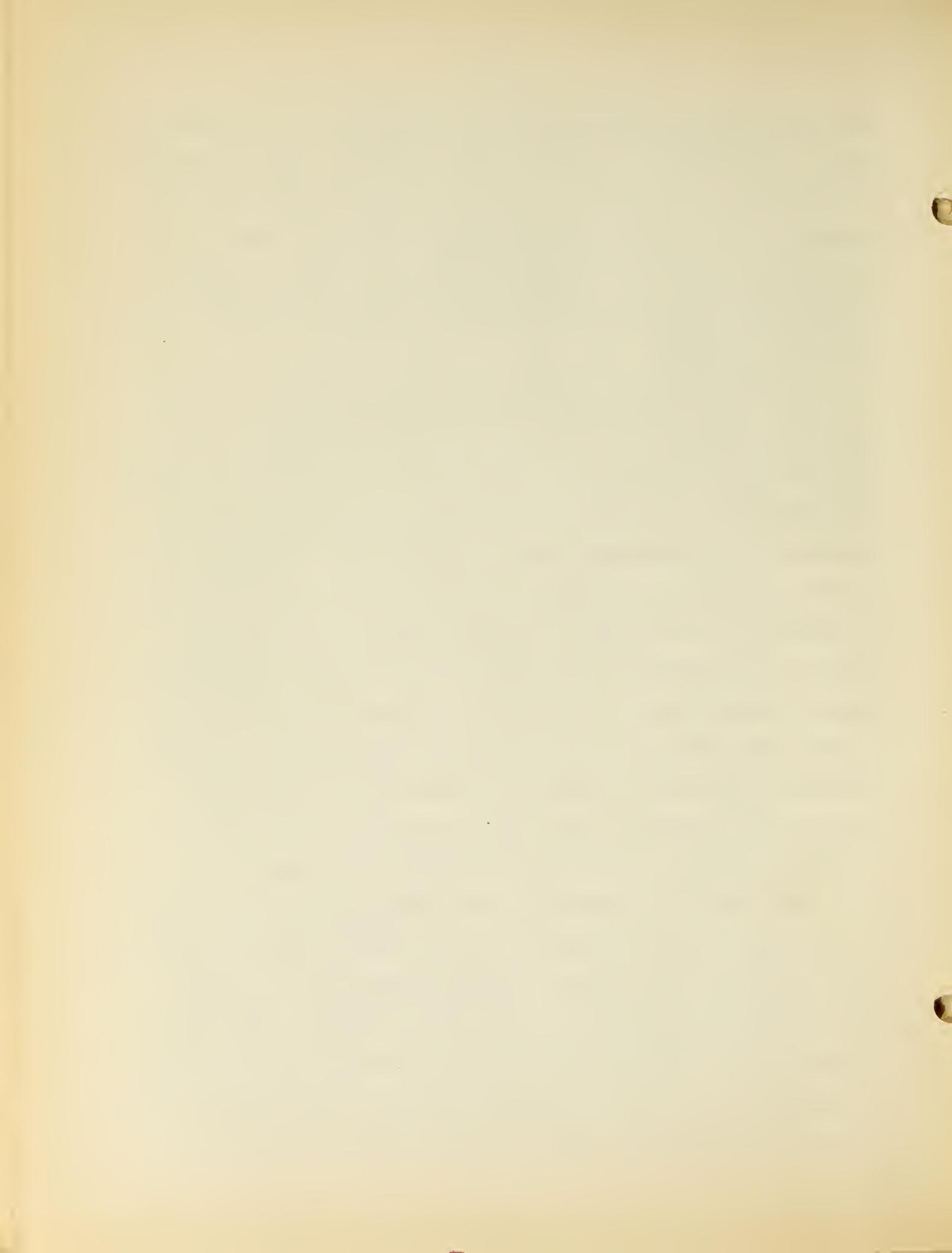
"A Cure for the Spleen," was written in 1775, probably by Johnathan Mitchell Sewall. There is, however, no direct evidence as to its author. It was well written, and expressed the views of the Tories in regard to independence for the colonies. The spirit of New England from the point of view of the frequenters of the tap-room, was shown. It was supposed to be a conversation on the times, over a friendly tankard and pipe. The play was highly commended by Dunlap, but as a dramatic production it could not measure up to "The Fall of British Tyranny." The intention of the play was to give instruction in politics, and to gain recruits to the cause of the King. The characters were Sharp, a country parson, Bumper, a country justice; Fillpot, an inn-keeper; Graveairs, a deacon, Trim, a barber; Brin, a Quaker; and Puff, a late Representative. The Quaker, the justice, and the parson, since they are all in accord with the cause of royalty, were represented as perfect, shread, honest and well-informed, while the deacon and the Representative, since they opposed the king's government were represented as stupid and ignorant blockheads. There was a certain amount of interest in the arguments advanced by the different persons, because of the way in which the events eventually turned out. For example, the wavering Continental



Congress, and the foolish beliefs of the people as to liberty, took a turn which the Tories had not expected. The men brought together in the tap-room had their rural characteristics well marked. There was some attempt at realistic treatment. An effort was made to show all sorts and conditions of people. The American character, both the lowly and better conditioned, was well portrayed.

"The Blockade of Boston," is a play attributed to General Burgoyne. It was an acting piece, and was never published. It is a farce ridiculing the Americans. The play is remembered only because of the fact that during a performance, which was being given by Burgoyne's men, at Faneuil Hall, Boston, a very curious occurrence took place. In one of its mer iest scenes, a sergeant, in the wildest confusion suddenly rushed on the stage, and snouted that the rebels were attacking the British works on Bunker Hill. The audience supposing it to be a part of the play, applauded loudly because of the soldier's natural acting. Soon after, however, the beating of drums, brought home to the people the idea that the soldier had been in earnest, and sent the actors hurrying off the stage.

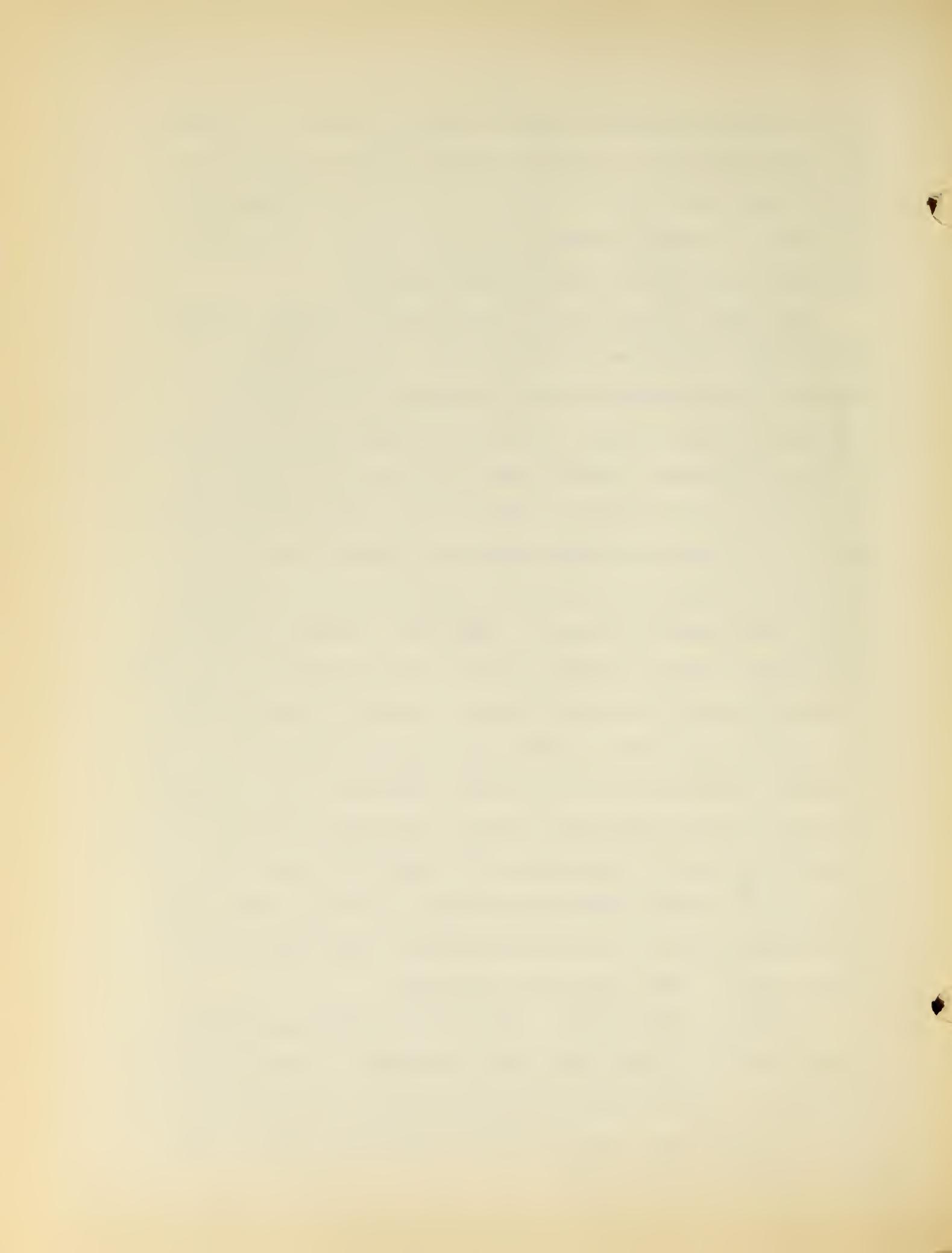
"The Patriots" was another play written during the period of political satire. However, it took a course midway between the two extremes of American patriotism and British toryism. The moderate whigs seem to be the ones defended in this play. It was probably written soon after the battles of Trenton and Princeton, as it refers to them as of recent occurrence. The comedy in the play was poor. It gave a fairly good picture



of the period, and did not fail to include the love interest. The political aspect of the play dealt with the doings of one of those committees of safety that were so necessary at that time. The play in regard to structure was more like a play than any that had been written before it.

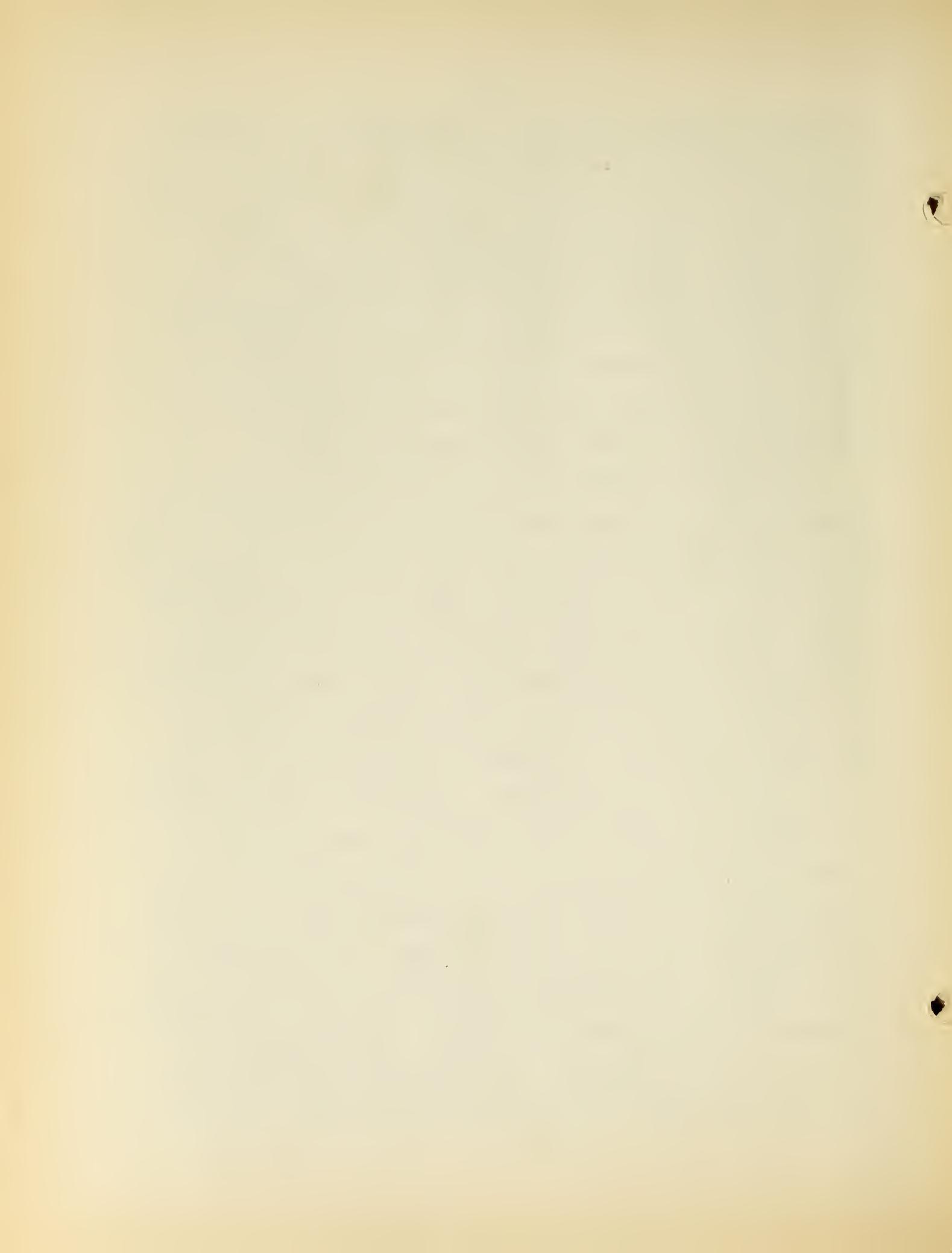
Mrs. Mercy Warren was the most important writer during the period of political pamphleteering. Born in Boston on 1728, she was the sister of the celebrated James Otis, the impetuous patriot orator. In 1754, she married James Warren, a Plymouth merchant. Warren like his wife, her father, and her brother, was strongly in favor of the cause of the colonies. At the death of Joseph Warren, he became President of Provincial Congress, and while the American Army was in Cambridge, was Paymaster General. Among Mrs. Warren's most intimate friends was Mrs. Adams, the wife of John Adams. Her house at Plymouth was the meeting place of the most celebrated men and women of the time. It was here that the champions of the Colonial cause gathered to air their grievances against Great Britain. In this regard Mrs. Warren once wrote "By the Plymouth fireside were many political plans originated, discussed and digested." In the effective handling of satire, Mrs. Warren had no peer, and it was for this reason, rather than for the novelty of her plays, that she was known.

Among the better known works of Mrs. Warren were "The Adulateur," "The Group," and "The Blockheads or The Affrighted Officers." "The Adulateur" was not so keen in its satire as were the other two, since it was written before her ire was



aroused by Burgoyne with his play "The Blockade of Boston," but it served to attract attention to her ability as a writer. Her poetical gifts were early recognized by her contemporaries and the use of them for the advantage of the colonies was encouraged by such men as John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. John Adams wrote to James Warren, concerning the Boston Tea Party, that he expected "to see a late glorious event celebrated by a certain poetical pen, which has no equal that I know of in this country."<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Warren lived until 1814.

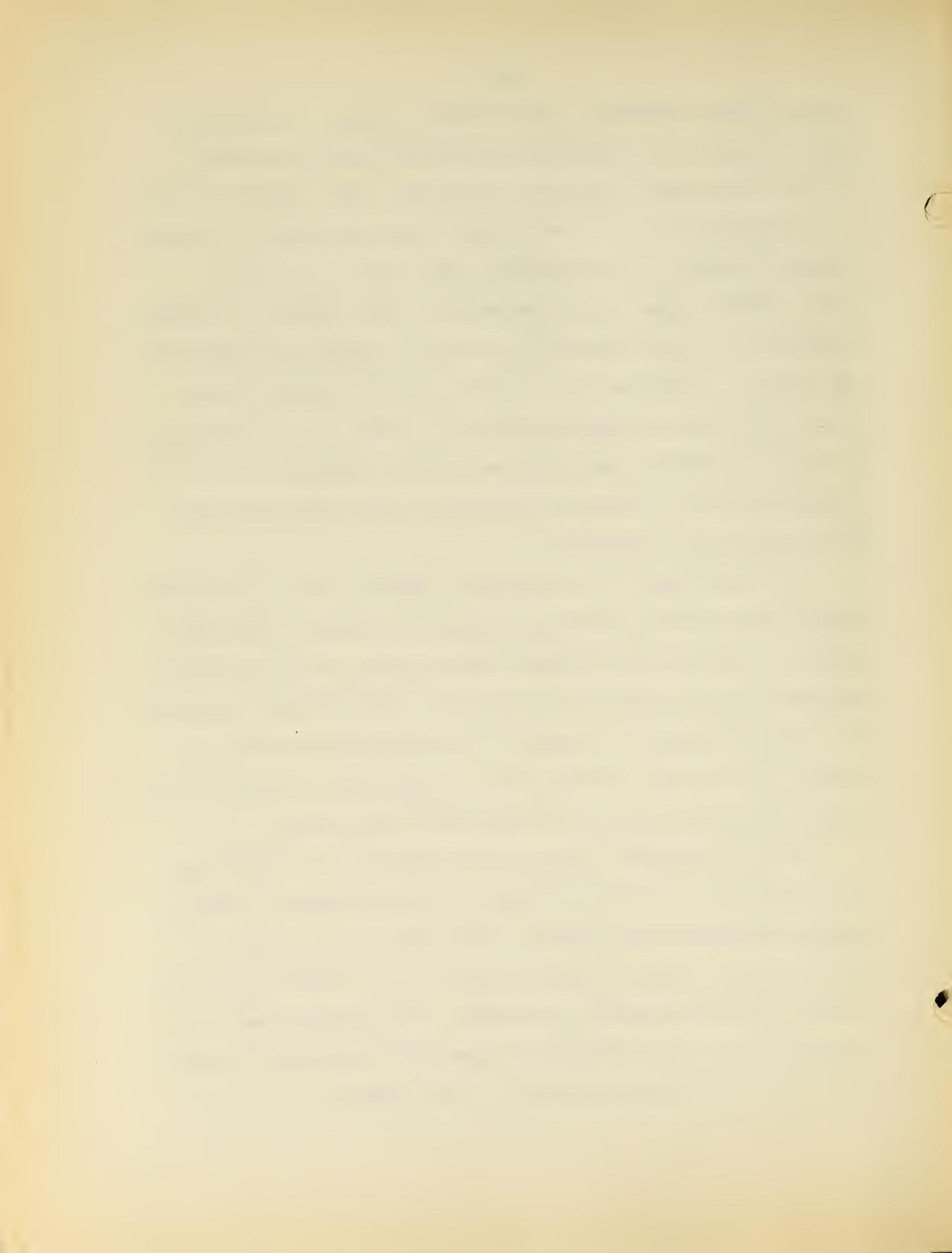
"The Adulateur," was written in 1773, previous to the time when Mrs. Warren became really partisan in her views. The play was important only insofar as it was connected with the historical events which it satirized. Important persons were ridiculed. The title page described the play as "A Tragedy, as it is now acted in Upper Servia." Mrs. Warren placed her scene as far as possible from actual surroundings, trusting that her readers ignorance of geography would be as great as her own. There was no plot whatever in the play. "The Adulateur" was similar in design to "The Group" but lacked the venom which was contained in the latter. The chief satire of the play was directed against Thomas Hutchinson, who had held at the same time the three offices of member of the Council, Chief Justice, and Lieutenant Governor, and who finally became Governor of the Massachusetts Colony. He was known in the play as Rapatio. Hutchinson was a native of Massachusetts, and for this reason his scheming was more bitterly resented



by his fellow citizens. He pretended to deny the right of Great Britain to tax America, and handed around patriotic letters to be read, which he never sent. Mrs. Warren received her inspiration for the satire from the publication of letters from Hutchinson, to Thomas Whately and others in England. These letters urged the Government of Great Britain to declare martial law in the colonies, to make the judges dependent upon the crown, to suppress the charter of Rhode Island, and in many other ways to interfere with the rights of the colonists. The letters, having been discovered, were published with the result that great hatred was directed toward Hutchinson who had betrayed his countrymen.

The highlights of the play are the following: The first scene showed Brutus, Cassius, Junius and Portius, who represented James Otis, John Adams, Samuel Adams and John Hancock, declaring their intention to fight for independence. Hutchinson was represented as longing for the day when he should really be Governor, in order that he might get revenge for the hurts he received during the Stamp Act disturbance.

In the second act, there was a description by Cassius, of the killing of a boy of eleven, by an informer. Governor Rapatio conspired with Bagshot, who represented Captain Preston of the King's forces, to fire on the people and as a result the Boston Massacre occurred. This takes place off stage but the author describes in powerful language the killing of unarmed men and children by the troops.



The next scene took place in Faneuil Hall, and showed Hutchinson conferring with his Council. The author omitted, however, the most dramatic scene of all, namely, that in which Samuel Adams told Hutchinson what he must do, in no uncertain terms.

Very little satire had crept into the play up to this point, there being mostly forcible and direct description. But with the introduction of the character of Meagre, under which name Foster Hutchinson, the Governor's brother appears, the satirical touch became evident.

The characters of the play became well known throughout the colonies, and especially among the intimate friends of Mrs. Warren.

"The Group" was probably written in the early months of 1775. It was published the day before the Battle of Lexington, and was sent in portions to General Warren on the battlefield. The play was anonymous, and like "The Adulateur," was important only as connected with the historical events which it satirized. There was no plot in the play, it being merely an attack upon the Tories, put in dialogue. This piece is more valuable to the historian than to the theatre chronicler, for it gives first hand information about the men and the conditions of the time.

The characters in the play--Hazlerod, Meagre, Hateall, and so forth, represented such noteworthy public individuals as Peter Oliver, Foster Hutchinson, and Timothy Ruggles.



The main point of the play was the voicing of the resentment of the people against the men who had been appointed members of the Council of Massachusetts, by the command of the King, instead of being elected by the Assembly. The entire play dealt with the struggle of democracy against monarchical oppression.

"The Blackheads or The Affrighted Officers," was written in 1776 and is attributed to Mrs. Warren. It was written in response to Burgoyne's "The Blockade of Boston," especially to the incident at Faneuil Hall, when Burgoyne's men, during a performance of the play, scampered off the stage on hearing that the patriots were attacking the British works on Bunker Hill.

Mrs. Warren's bitterness toward the British is clearly shown in the prologue to this play, which runs as follows:

"Your pardon first I crave for this intrusion.

The topic's such it looks like a delusion;

And next your candour, for I swear and vow,

Such an attempt I never made till now.

But constant laughing at the Desp'rate fate,

The bastard sons of Mars endured of late,

Induc'd me thus to minute down the notion,

Which put my risibles in such commotion.

By Yankees frightened too! Oh, dire to say!

Why Yankees sure at Red-coats faint away!

Oh, yes - They thought so too, for lack-a-day,

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Their gen'ral turned the blockade to a play:

Poor vain poltroons--with justice we'll retort,

And call them blockheads for their idle sport."<sup>1</sup>

There was in this play some suggestion of a plot, women characters, and a bit of humor which showed that Mrs. Warren had improved as a dramatic writer over her first attempts.

This account of Mrs. Warren and her plays concludes our discussion of the manner in which the Whigs and Tories used the drama as a means of spreading propaganda during the Revolutionary War.

1. Moses, page 49.



CHAPTER III

TRANSITION PERIOD

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The ban which Congress had placed upon play-acting proved to be insufficient in regard to preventing entirely the production of drama. Although the prohibition was still in effect, the year 1787 was a particularly busy one in the matter of play producing. The American Company put on plays in Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, and Annapolis during this year. The repertory included such plays as, "Robinson Crusoe," "Provoked Husband," and "Miss in Her Teens".

The outstanding event of this season was the production on April 16 of "The Contrast." This was a comedy written by Royall Tyler. It was the first comedy written in America, and was also the first play written by an American on an American subject to be presented by a professional company of actors on an American stage. The play was very well received, as was shown by the number of times it was repeated.

Royall Tyler, the author of "The Contrast" was born in Boston, July 18, 1757, near Faneuil Hall. His original name was William Clark Tyler but was changed to Royall by an act of Court. His father, a merchant, was a member of the King's Council, and took part in the Stamp Act controversy. From him, Royall inherited much of his ability. The family was wealthy and influential. Tyler was educated at the Boston Latin School and at Harvard. He was graduated from Harvard in 1776, having followed in the footsteps of his father who had also graduated

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from that institution of learning. Yale in the same year, 1776, honored him with a degree. Three years later he received a Master of Arts degree from Harvard, and in 1811 from the University of Vermont. As a student Tyler showed considerable ability, being the author of numerous witty articles. After college he joined the Independent Company of Boston and in 1778 attained the rank of Major, in which capacity he served during the attack on Newport. He was admitted to the bar in 1780 following which he moved from place to place, finally settling in Brattleboro, Vermont. While at Quincy (then Braintree), Massachusetts, he became engaged to Abby, the daughter of John Adams. The marriage never took place, however, and for a long while Tyler was extremely gloomy. He later married Mary Palmer.

At the outbreak of Shay's Rebellion, Tyler again became a Major and took a prominent part in the capture of the fugitives. While in pursuit of the scoundrels he was led to New York City, where he arrived March 12, 1787. Up to this time he had little thought of every becoming a playwright. However, after having witnessed his first play, which was Sheridan's "School for Scandal", the inspiration to write began to burn in him, and he wrote in the period of a few weeks, his comedy , "The Contrast". Tyler also wrote many other pieces, but all of his works are generally forgotten today. After settling in Vermont, Tyler became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of that State. He died at Brattleboro on August 26, 1826.



"The Contrast," was produced on April 16, 1787, at the John Street Theatre, in New York, by the American Company. So great was the success of the play that it was performed in New York five times in rapid succession. The praises bestowed upon "The Contrast" were the incentive to Dunlap's first comedy. Although there was little genuine merit in the comedy of the play, it was liked because it was an American production. There was very little excitement in the play, less plot, and no incident at all. The action was carried along through conversation, and there was a total lack of situation. But when we consider that the author of this comedy had never seen a play acted until shortly before he began to write it, and that it was written in the period of a few weeks, we must give credit to Tyler for having done such a praiseworthy and successful piece of work.

At this point in our discussion of the early drama in America, we come to one of the greatest men ever to be connected with the American Theatre, namely, William Dunlap, who is known as the father of the American Theatre.

Dunlap was born at Perth Amboy, New Jersey, in February, 1766. He grew up with little regular education, but with a love for Shakespeare and Pope and the romance of history. There was a great deal of color and variety in his life. To him we must turn for whatever knowledge we wish to acquire concerning the early theatre, and its actors. Dunlap was many sided in his tastes and activities. At an early age he went to Europe



where he studied art under Benjamin West. He learned little from West, spending his time at the theatre in preference to study. On his return from Europe the stories of the success which Royall Tyler had with "The Contrast" caused him to write plays himself, and he began his long career as a dramatist. He was the first American man of letters who made the writing of plays a profession.

The pictures of Dunlap are very careful to indicate in realistic fashion the fact that he had but one eye. When a boy, his right eye was cut by a piece of firewood thrown by a playmate and its sight totally destroyed. In spite of this handicap, however, he saw more of life than his contemporaries, for he mingled much in the social life of the time, and had a variety of friends, among them Charles Brockden Brown, the novelist, and George Frederick Cooke, the tragedian.

It is the general opinion of biographers that Dunlap is remembered more for his unique personality and amiability as a man rather than for any real service he rendered to the drama. As a playwright he was not even of the second rank. His History of the American Theatre contains many errors and misstatements, yet he deserves praise. Oral Sumner Coad, one of his most recent biographers says, "William Dunlap has never ranked among our distinguished men of letters, and he will never do so. He labored as zealously as any, but no amount of application could make up for the gift that he lacked. He challenges our interest almost wholly as a pioneer. He took

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up his pen when the literature of the United States was still feeble and ill-supported. He threw himself especially into the neglected and unremunerative field of American drama, and though he produced nothing of lasting merit, he surpassed the work of his forerunners, he established playwriting as a respectable profession, he stimulated others to follow his example, and he exerted a distinct influence in determining the course of our drama during the last years of the Eighteenth century."<sup>1</sup>

He was an adptor of other men's ideas instead of an originator of his own. As a dramatist he made no real headway until he began to translate Kotzebue. Concerning this a contemporary of Dunlap, who knew him well, namely, John Bernard, says, "Induced by the success of his first play to make drama his pursuit in preference to painting, he cemented the connection by becoming a manager and soon sank into a mere adapter, whose highest pretensions were tact and facility. He translated some twenty pieces from the German and French, and was so fortunate as to be the first to present Kotzebue to the Americans. His happiest effort was perhaps the drama of "Abaelino" from the German of Zschokke, and his very worst was undoubtedly the one he seemed to prize most, a drama on the death of Major Andre--a mass of fustian and platitude upon great names and themes."<sup>2</sup>

Dunlap died where he had been born, at Perth Amboy, New Jersey, in September, 1839. He has long been remembered and

1. O.S. Coad, William Dunlap, page 280.  
2. Hornblow, Volume I, page 181.



will continue to be, however, for his name is intimately associated with the beginnings of American painting, American literary life, and the American Theatre.

Dunlap's first play was called, "The Modest Soldier; or Love in New York". It was written in 1787, following his return to America from Europe. He registers the facts of the play himself in the following manner: "As a medium of communication between the playwright and the manager, a man was pointed out, who had for a time been of some consequence on the London boards, and now resided under another name in New York. This was the Dubellamy of the English stage, a first singer and walking-gentleman. He was not past his meridian, but still a handsome man, and was found sufficiently easy of access and full of the courtesy of the old school. A meeting was arranged at the City Tavern, and a bottle of Madeira discussed with the merits of this first-born of a would-be author. The wine was praised, and the play was praised, the first, perhaps, made the second tolerable--that must be good which can repay a man of the world for listening to an author who reads his own play."<sup>1</sup>

In the course of time Dunlap reached the presence of the managers of the American Company, Hallam and Henry, and after some conference with them, the play was accepted. It was never produced, however, because there was no good part for the manager, Henry, nor was there a part suited to his wife.

Dunlap was quick to learn, and while waiting for the

1. Dunlap, page 78.



production of his first work, he wrote a second comedy called, "The Father, or American Shandyism", in 1789. This time he made sure that there was a part suited to Henry, and also one that would please his wife. The play was favorably received. The fact that it was performed seven times indicates that the play was a success. Dunlap himself considered it to be his best play. There was a combination of purpose in the play, to amuse and instruct, as was characteristic of the writing of the century. The scene of the play was strictly local, the action taking place in New York. From the opening scene, which shows Mr. and Mrs. Racket at breakfast, there was an attempt at realistic portraiture. The plot runs as follows: Mrs. Racket, the wife of a young merchant, is consoling herself for his neglect by giving attention to Ranter, who is masquerading as a British officer, but in reality is the servant of Captain Haller, of the American army, who it is thought is dead. Ranter has designs on the fortune of Caroline Felton, Mrs. Racket's sister. Colonel Duncan, the guardian of both girls arrives in time to save the situation with the aid of Haller, who turns out to be the Colonel's son, left in Edinburgh in infancy to be brought up by a friend. It turns out that Haller has met Caroline in Canada and they have become betrothed.

The play is lively, the conversation is bright at times, and it leaves room for action. The American Quarterly Review said of the piece, "The plot is sufficiently dramatic to carry an interest throughout; the characters are well drawn, and well



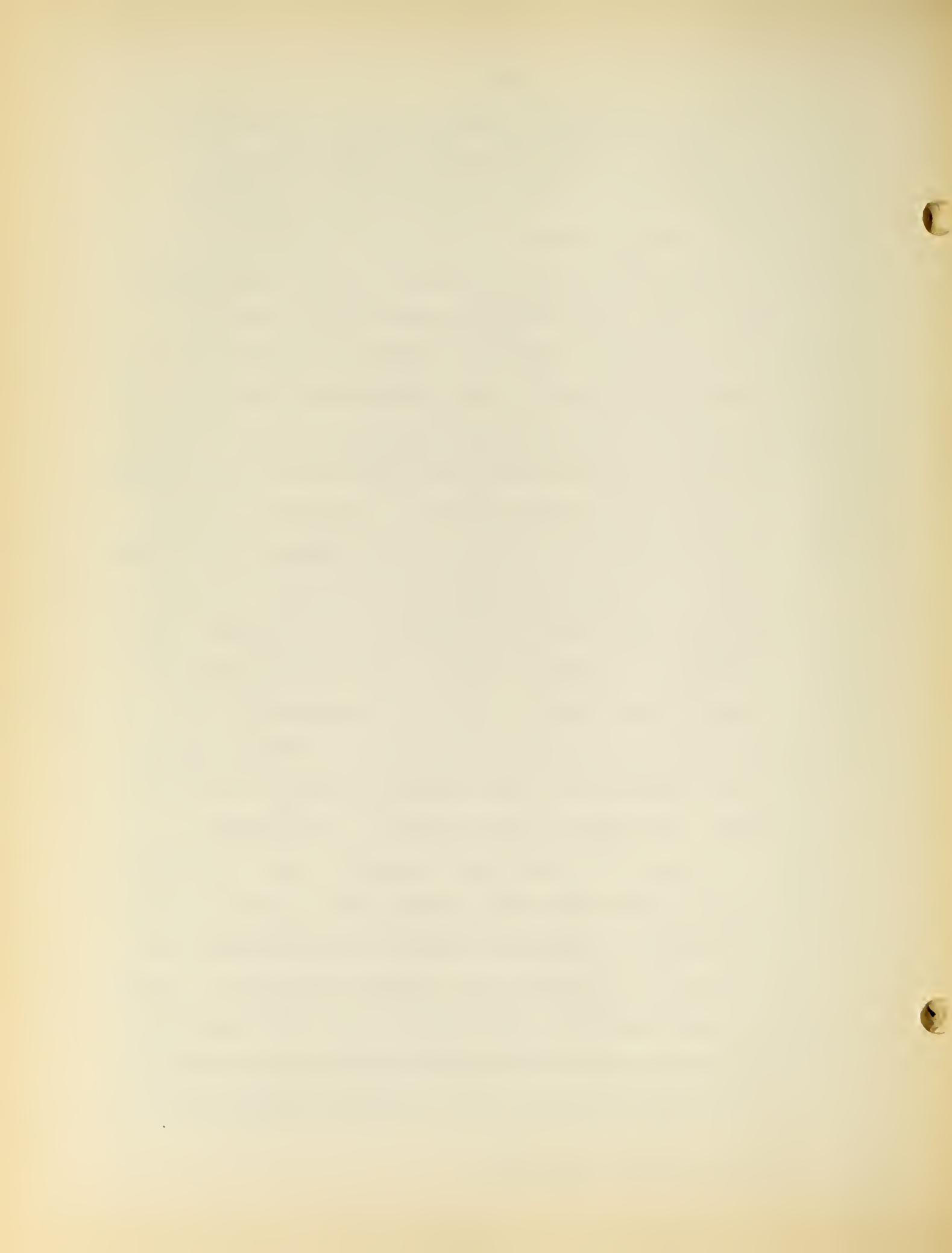
employed; and the dialogue possesses, what is indispensable to genuine comedy, a brief terseness, and unstudied ease, which few of the productions of the present era afford."<sup>1</sup>

In 1806 Dunlap reprinted the play with additions and changes of names and called it, "The Father of an Only Child."

Dunlap's next play was an interlude called, "Darby's Return", which he wrote following a request by Wignell to write a play for his benefit. The interlude was first performed November 24, 1789, and gained special interest because of the fact that President Washington witnessed the performance. The plot of the play is built around the recounting by a soldier, who has returned to Ireland, of his adventures in America.

The best known play of Dunlap's at the present time is his "Andre", in which Washington appears as the General. The play was produced on March 30, 1793, in the New Park Theatre, of which Dunlap was manager. He writes concerning the performance, "The receipts were \$17 dollars, a temporary relief. The play was received with warm applause, until Mr. Cooper in the character of a young American officer, who had been treated as a brother by Andre when a prisoner with the British, in his zeal and gratitude, having pleaded for the life of the spy in vain, tears the American cockade from his casque, and throws it from him. This was not, perhaps could not be, understood by a mixed assembly: they thought the country and its defenders insulted, and a hiss ensued--it was soon quieted and the play ended with applause. But the feeling excited by the

1. Hornblow, Volume I, page 178.



incident was propagated out of doors. Cooper's friends wished the play withdrawn, on his account, fearing for his popularity. However, the author made an alteration, in the incident, and subsequently all went on to the end with applause."<sup>1</sup>

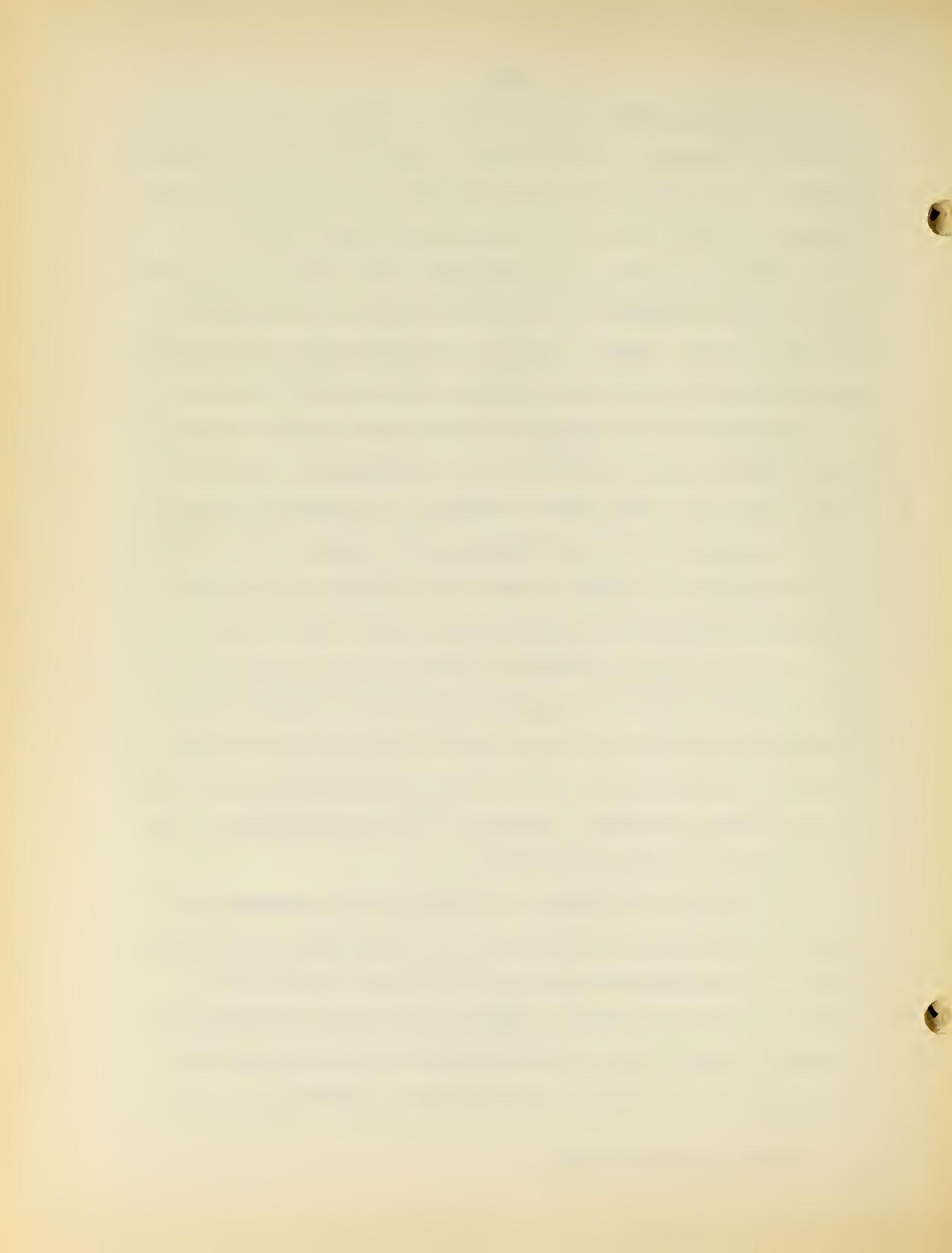
"Andre" was easily one of Dunlap's best plays. The structure is good, especially in regard to unity. The character of Andre is well drawn. The plot is closely knit, and evolves around the various attempts to bring about Andre's release.

Because of the popularity of patriotic pieces, Dunlap rewrote Andre in 1803, as "The Glory of Columbia." Among his other works were "The Miser's Wedding," "The Fatal Deception, or the Progress of Guilt," "Fontainville Abbey", "The Archers or Mountaineers of Switzerland," "Tell Truth and Shame the Devil," "The Mysterious Monk,", and a great many others.

In summing up the career of Dunlap we may conclude that he had little ability as a playwright, that he made many misstatements, and that he wrote quantity rather than quality, but in spite of this we cannot deny that he deserves a place among the notables of America, because of his earnest desire to aid in the advance of American drama.

The treaty with England in 1794 and the consequent refusal of the French government to receive Charles C. Pinckney, when he succeeded James Monroe as Minister of the United States to France, in 1796, caused a great deal of dissension in this country. As a result patriotic and political drama became the vogue among the playwrights. Chief among these

1. Dunlap, pages 222-223.



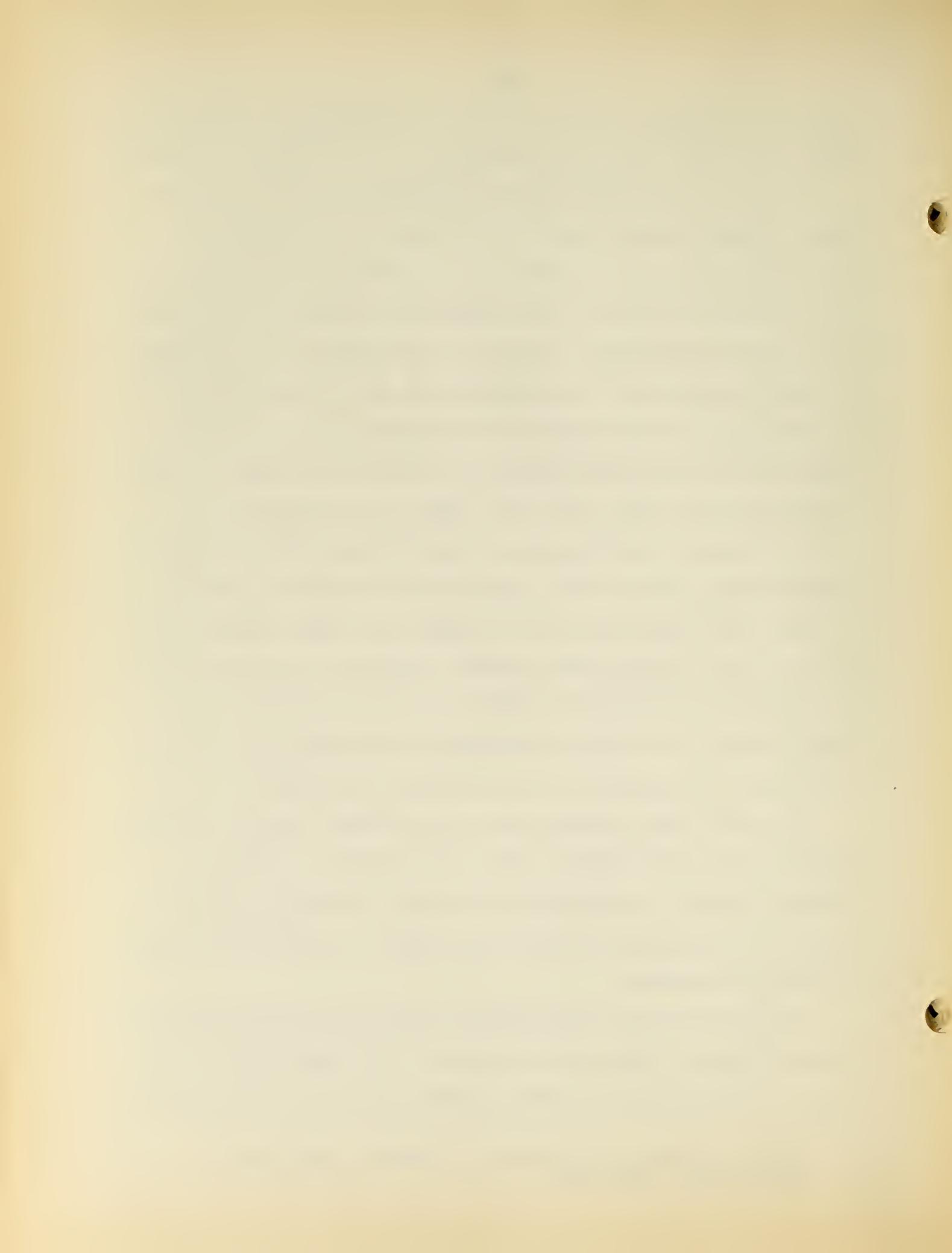
writers was Samuel Low, who wrote "The Politician Outwitted", which was by far the most entertaining of the political dramas.

There is very little known regarding the life of Samuel Low. Constant search has failed to reveal any information about him, except that he was born on December 12, 1765, and that he must have been in his political sympathies, a Federalist. His interests are indicated in his poems; his political in those written about the Constitution of the United States; his Masonic in those written for such orders as the Holland Lodge, and the Washington Chapter of Royal Arch Masons. Concerning his own works, Low says, "Many of the pieces were written at a very early age, and most of them under singular disadvantages; among which, application to public business, for many years past, was not the least; not only because it allowed little leisure for literary pursuits, but because it is of a nature peculiarly inimical to the cultivation of poetic talent. For his own amusement and improvement he has written--at the request of his friends he publishes."<sup>1</sup>

Low also wrote anthems, and a long poem, entitled "Winter Displayed," is attributed to him. Two volumes of poems appeared in 1800, the examination of which shows that Low, in a social and fraternal way, must have been a very active member of New York Society.

"The Politician Outwitted" was written by Low in 1788 and was published in 1789. Dunlap said of the piece, "About this time, Mr. Samuel Low,---wrote a comedy, which was rejected by

1. Moses, Representative Plays by American Dramatists (1765-1819), page 354.



the managers and published for their justification by the author."<sup>1</sup>

This criticism is rather harsh, for "The Politician Outwitted" although not really a great drama, presents an interesting picture of the social life of the period. It has historical value, and shows the influence of Sheridan's artificial comedy upon Low. The plot centers around a disagreement concerning the New Constitution. The play is criticized by Moses in the following manner: "The construction of the plot is mechanical, but the convictions of the two opposing fathers, on the subject of the Constitution, give the play an interest in character and in viewpoint which is marked. It is not a piece adapted to the theatre, there being slight action of a cumulative kind; but, as an example of early closet drama, it cannot be ignored."<sup>2</sup>

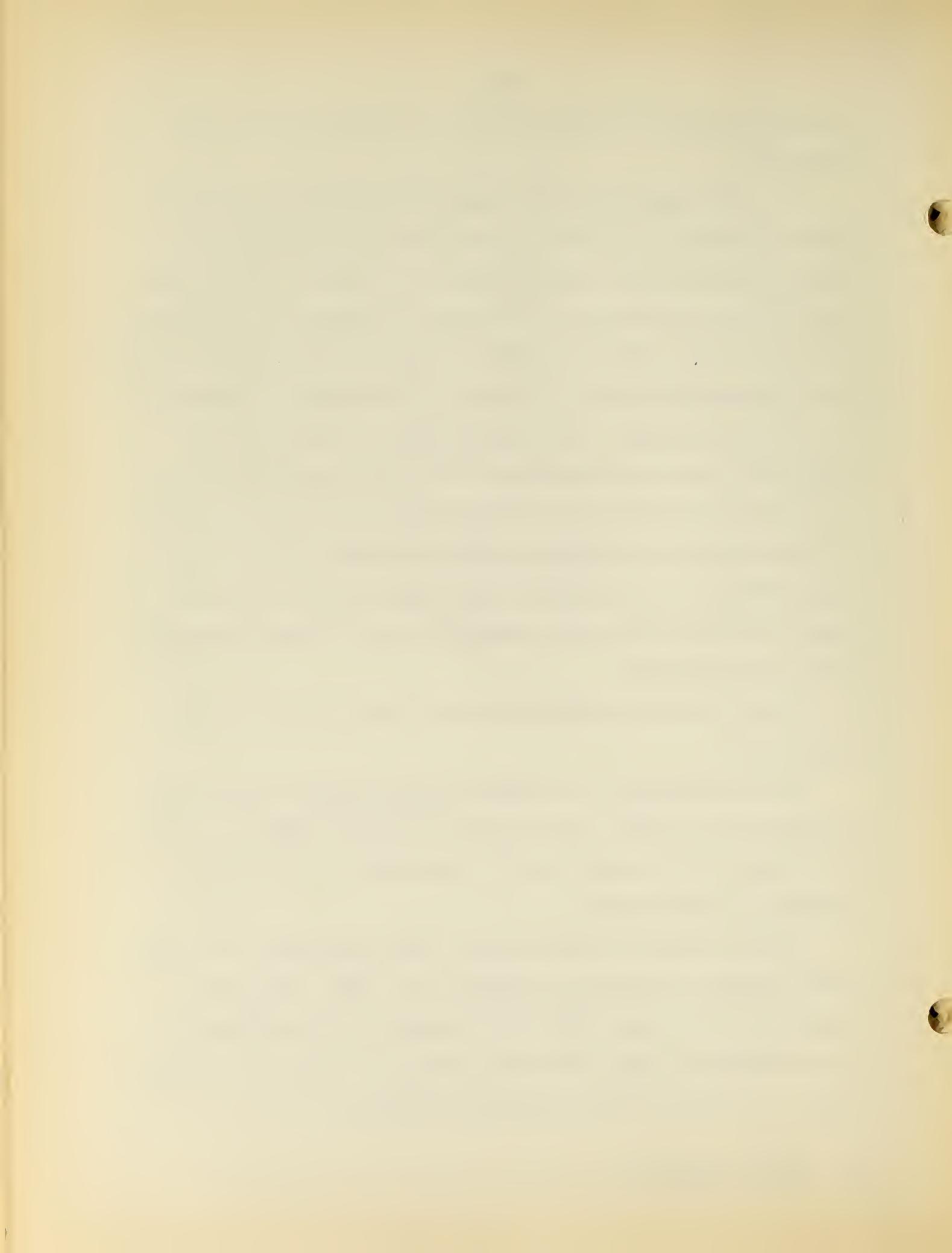
There were other political works during this period, among them:

"The Politicians or a State of Things which John Murdock had published in 1793. In this play Murdock shows himself to be in favor of the action of the government, and a strong supporter of Washington.

"Bunker Hill" by John Burk and first produced at the Haymarket Theatre in Boston on February 17, 1797. This play marked the first time that battle scenes of the Revolution were actually put upon the stage, although it was not the first play to be laid in the Revolutionary period.

1. Dunlap, page 80.

2. Moses, Representative Plays, (1765-1819), page 355.

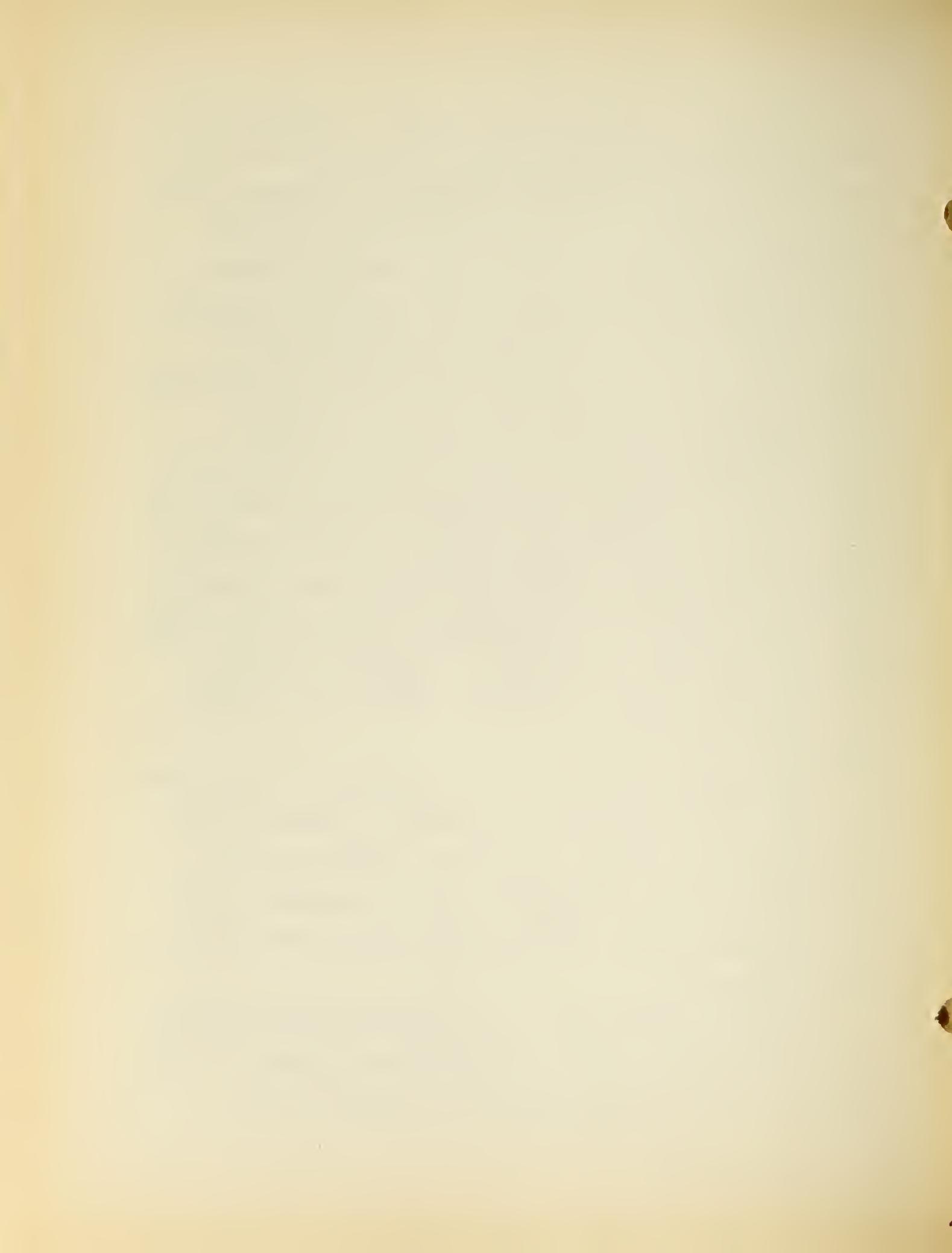


"Americana; or a New Tale of the Genii", a masque, the author of which is not known, and which was performed in the City Theatre at Charleston, South Carolina on February 9, 1798. The masque was prompted by a love of country, and the plot concerns the transplanting of Elutheria, Genius of Liberty, from England to America, to become the companion of Americana, the Genius of America. She is aided by Galiana, Genius of France, but much more effectively by Fulmenifer, who represents Benjamin Franklin. Etherius, the Commander-in Chief of America's forces, is another powerful factor for good, while Typhon, Genius of Tyranny, and Fastidio, Genius of Pride, are the evil forces, which deprive Elutheria of consciousness for a time. Quinn says of the piece, "The blank verse is adequate and at times rises to vigor and beauty, and the author treated with some skill the curious mixture of symbolic characters, real people and mountain nymphs which belong to an orthodox masque of the period."<sup>1</sup>

"Federalism Triumphant in the Steady Habits of Connecticut Alone, or the Turnpike Road to a Fortune," a dramatic satire reflecting state politics, was written in 1802, by Leonard Chester, a graduate of Yale. This play is a strenuous attack upon the office-holding class, and also exhibits true sentiments of democracy.

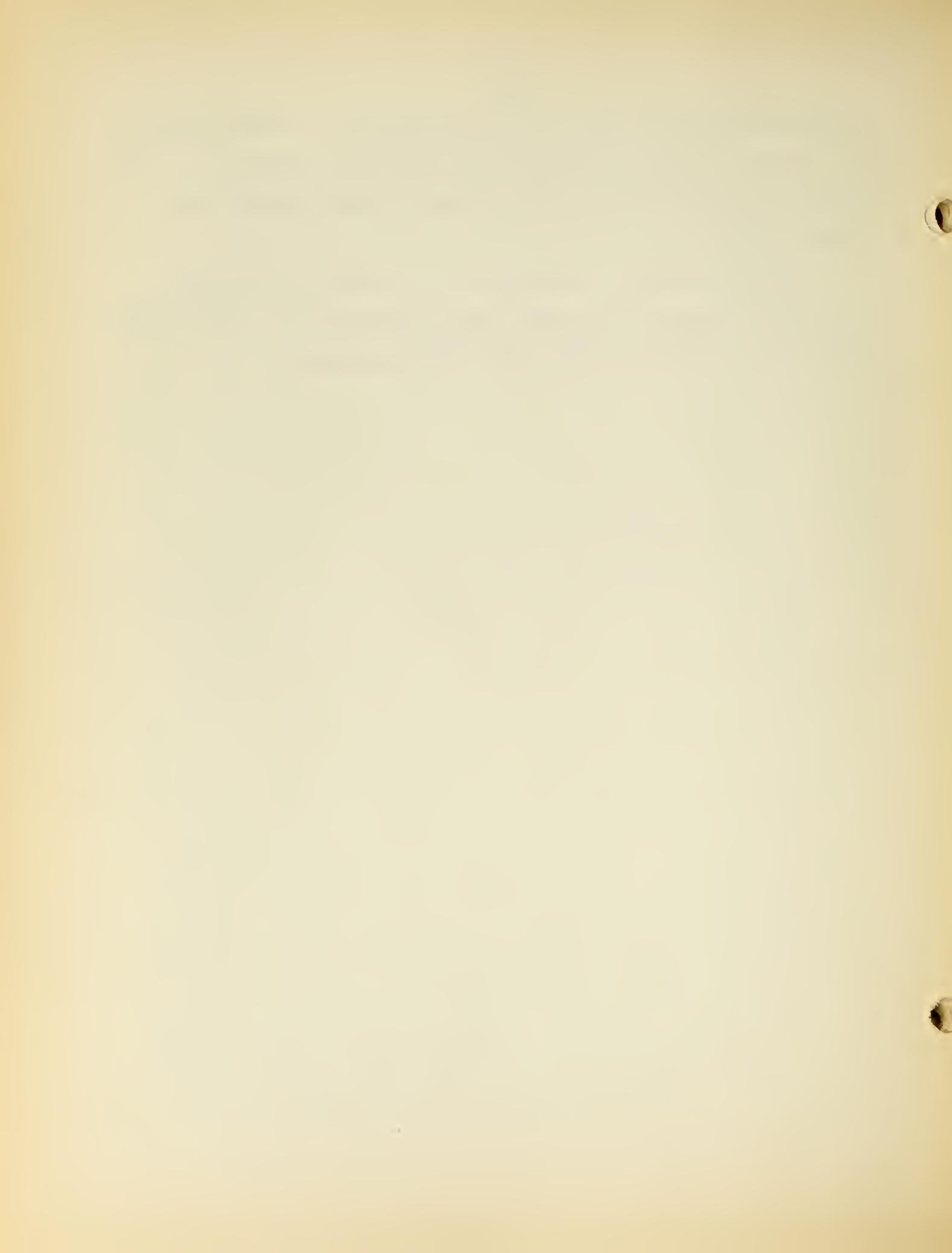
"The Essex Junto," written by J. Horatio Nichols, and published anonymously in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1802. The play is representative of the type which were opposed to the

1. Quinn, page 127.



Federalist Administration. The only value of the play is that it reveals the opposition to the centralizing tendencies of the Federalists and the dread of a tendency toward monarchical institutions.

The above plays, I believe, are sufficient to acquaint us with the types of political drama employed by the playwrights during the period following the Revolutionary War.



CHAPTER IV

PERIOD OF 1805-1825



During the period of from 1805 to 1825, there were two outstanding figures in American drama. These men were James Nelson Barker, and John Howard Payne. The types of drama which they represented were of an entirely opposite nature. Barker concerned himself with the native plays, while the foreign pieces held the interest of Payne. Around these men we will group other writers who contributed to the development of the types represented by those two leaders, in our study of the twenty years mentioned above.

James Nelson Barker, the son of the Honourable John Barker, one-time Mayor of Philadelphia, and a general during the Revolutionary war, was born in Philadelphia on June 17, 1784. He received his education in Philadelphia. At the outbreak of the war of 1812, he received a commission, fighting mostly on the Canadian frontier, and winning distinction as a Captain of Artillery. At the close of the war Barker was appointed Deputy Adjutant General of the United States with the rank of Major. In 1819 he was supported by the Democratic party and elected Mayor of Philadelphia. From 1829 to 1838 he was the Collector of the Port of Philadelphia. On the election of Van Buren to the presidency, he was appointed First Comptroller of the Treasury. From that time on, he was connected with the highest offices in the department. He was an ardent supporter of Democracy, and



contributed to many papers of the time on political topics.

He died March 9, 1858.

Barker chose to write on American subjects because he felt the lack of native drama and wished to do what he could to fill this lack.

#### Notes on Barker's Plays

In 1804, he began to write, his first play being "The Spanish Rover". This he burned, however, before it was published.

In 1805, he wrote a masque, "America," which he described as a "brief, one act piece, consisting of poetic dialogue, and sung by the genius of America, Science, Liberty, and attendant Spirits, after the manner of the mask in the "Tempest."<sup>1</sup> This play was not produced.

"Attila", was his next piece. This was a tragedy, suggested by Gibbon. However, before it was completed he learned that John Stone was at work on a similar play, so he abandoned it.

"Tears and Smiles," was the first of his plays to be acted. It was written between May 1, and June 12, 1806. The piece was suggested by Warren, at a dinner at which Dunlap and Jefferson were present, and Jefferson asked that a Yankee character be put in for him. Regarding the Yankee character Barker says, "I wonder what Hackett would say to it! The truth is, I had never even seen a Yankee at the

1. Dunlap, page 376.



time.<sup>1</sup> The play was a comedy of manners, the scene of which was laid in Philadelphia, at about the time it was written.

"The Embargo, or What News," was written on the suggestion of Blisset, a comedian of the Philadelphia Company, to dramatize the Embargo Bills of December 22, 1807, and February 19, 1808, which forbade American vessels to engage in foreign trade. The play was produced at the Chestnut Street Theatre on March 16, 1808, and was generally well received. The manuscript of the play was lost, and it was never printed.

"The Indian Princess, or la Belle Sauvage," was performed for the first time on April 6, 1808, at the Chestnut Street Theatre. It was the first play on the theme of the romance of Pocahontas, and was the first Indian play by an American to be performed. Barker had originally intended the play to be a regular drama, instead of which, when it was first produced, it formed the libretto for the music by a man named John Bray, of the New Theatre. During its first performance a near riot took place. Of this Barker said, "It was first performed----to a crowded house; but Webster, particularly obnoxious, at that period, to a large party, having a part in it, a tremendous tumult took place, and it was scarcely heard. I was on the stage, and directed the curtain to be dropped."<sup>2</sup> The piece was produced in practically all of the theatres in the United States. It was produced at Drury Lane, London, December 20, 1820, under the title of "Pocahontas, or the Indian Princess." The adaptor,

1 Dunlap, page 377.

2 Dunlap, pages 378-379

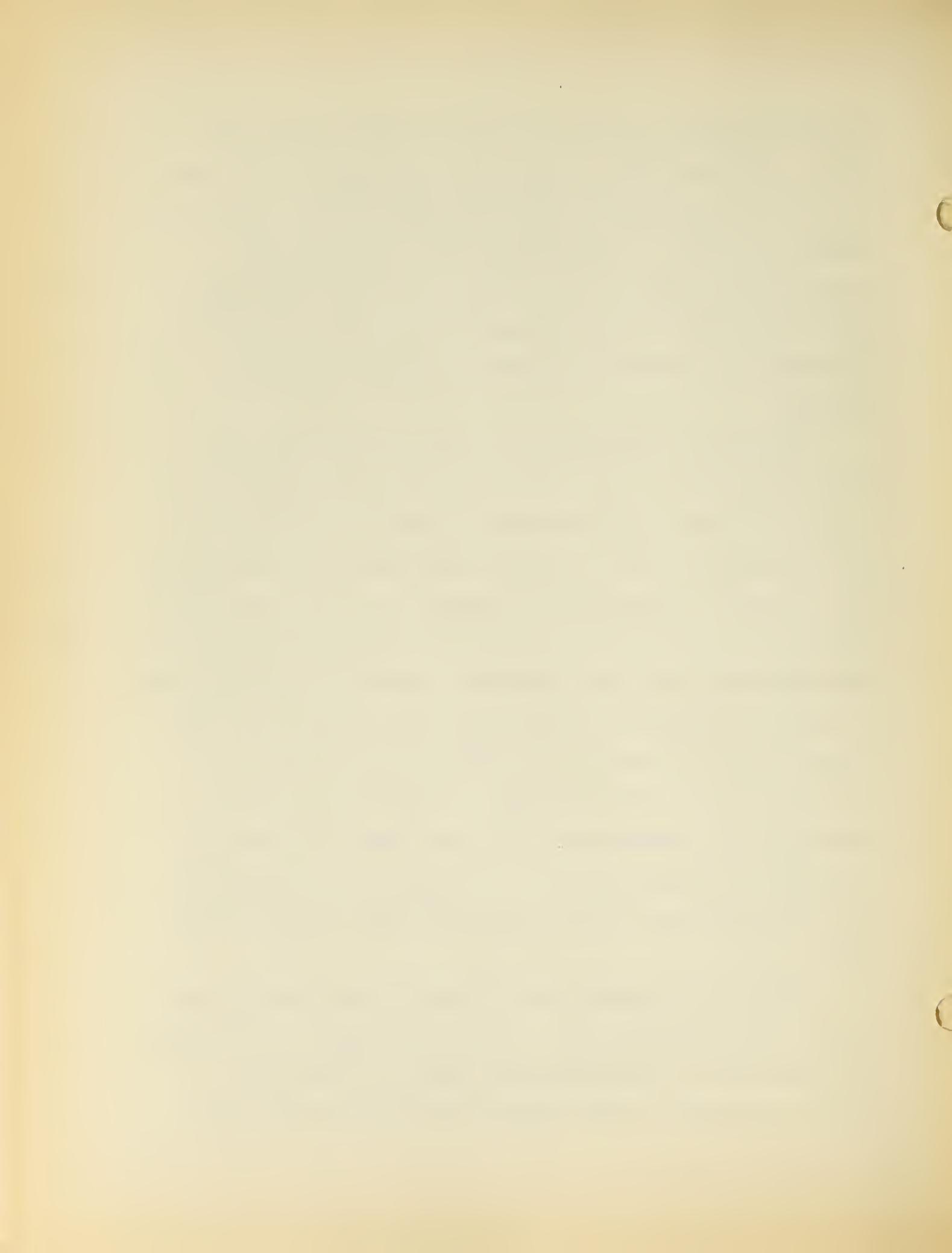
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however, omitted the comic parts and changed some of the names. Although Barker doubted that the play bore any relation to his own, Genest states positively that it was Barker's "Indian Princess." This appears to be the first well-authenticated instance of an original American play being produced in London after an initial performance in America. The play has a romantic atmosphere, and is interesting reading.

"Marmion," a dramatization of Scott's "Marmion," was written by Barker at the request of Wood, the Philadelphia manager. It was first performed on April 18, 1812, at the Park Theatre, New York. The play was announced as written by Thomas Morton, the British playwright, as it was feared that a work by a native author would not be appreciated. The play was successful, and when produced in Philadelphia, on January 1, 1813, the receipts were \$1414.00, about three times the usual amount. It was the only play put on for three consecutive nights during the season of 1812-13. The play failed to lose interest when the real author was announced. "Marmion" held the stage for many years, being produced as late as February 26, 1843, at the New Bowery Theatre in New York.

"How to Try a Lover," one of Barker's best constructed plays, was written in 1817. On the title page are the words, "as performed at the Philadelphia Theatre," and a cast is given, but Barker in his account of his career states that



the drama, "was cast, studied, rehearsed, and announced; and why it was not acted, I am unable to say, as it was the only drama I have written, with which I was satisfied."<sup>1</sup> It is generally agreed that had the play been performed, it would have been a success. It is an interesting comedy, based on "La Folie Espagnole," a novel by Pigault-Lebrun, and laid in the Spanish province of Catalonia in the thirteenth century. The dialogue is crisp and direct; the humor has universal appeal. The plot characters and some of the dialogue, Barker took from his French source, but he so arranged the incidents as to construct a unified play.

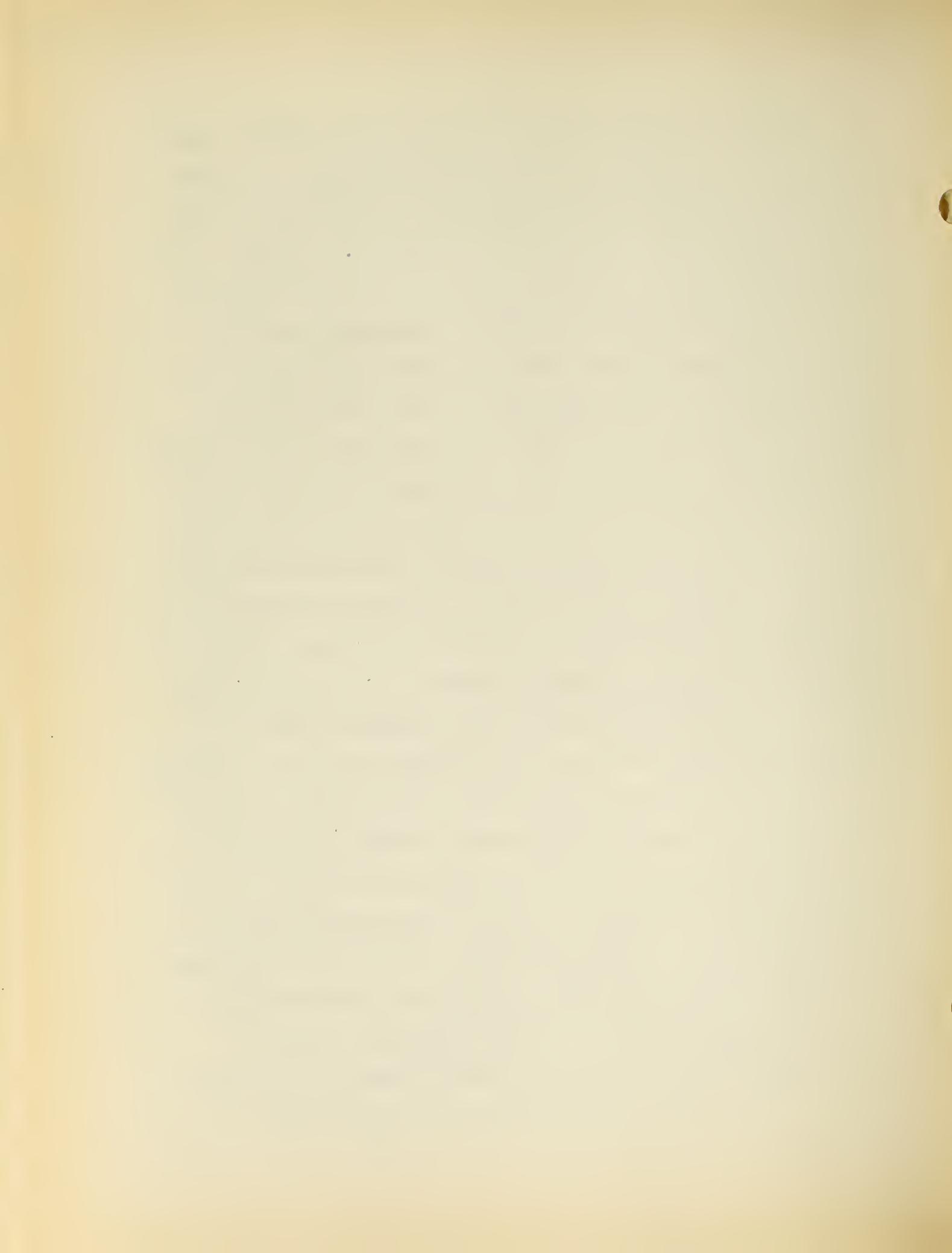
"Superstition," the last and greatest of Barker's plays, was first produced at the Chestnut Street Theatre, March 12, 1824. It was well received, which causes one to wonder why it was not performed more frequently. Quinn says of the play "The tragedy is one of the few in which the catastrophe is really inevitable. Barker's skill is shown by the way in which the complicated threads are all woven together naturally, and in which every honorable impulse, every brave action of Charles, conspires against him. The sense of impending doom is apparent almost from the beginning, and we witness one of the most cruel of situations, that in which human beings struggle against an evil fate wrought out of the bitter prejudice of their own kind."<sup>2</sup> This play was a fitting conclusion to a great dramatic career, for it was easily the best play that had been written in America up to this time.

1. Dunlap, page 380.  
2. Quinn, pages 180-181.

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The most important writer of native plays, during this period, next to Barker, was Mordecai Manuel Noah. Mr. Noah was born in Philadelphia July 19, 1785. In his early years he was apprenticed, according to the custom of the day, to a carver and gilder, but he spent most of his evenings in the Franklin Library and at the theatre, likewise attending school in his spare time. He held a minor position in the Auditor's office in Philadelphia, but his tastes inclined more to journalistic than they did to desk work, and in 1800, he travelled to Harrisburg, as a political reporter. Later he went to Charleston, and studied law, but before he had a chance to practice, he became editor of the Charleston City Gazette. In 1811, he was offered the position of Consul at Riga by President Madison, but declined. In 1813, he was sent by Mr. Monroe, as Consul to Tunis, at a time when the United States was having trouble with Algerian piracy. In 1816, he returned to New York, and settled there as a journalist. He was an editor of some skill, and his name is associated with the columns of New York's leading newspapers. In 1821 he became Sheriff. In 1823, he was admitted to the bar of New York and in 1829 to the bar of the Supreme Court of the United States. This same year he was appointed Surveyor of the Port of New York. He opposed the election of Van Buren, and give his vote to General Harrison. He was appointed, by Governor Seward, in 1841, Judge of the Court of Sessions; and in the same year was made Supreme Court



Commissioner. He died in New York on March 22, 1851.

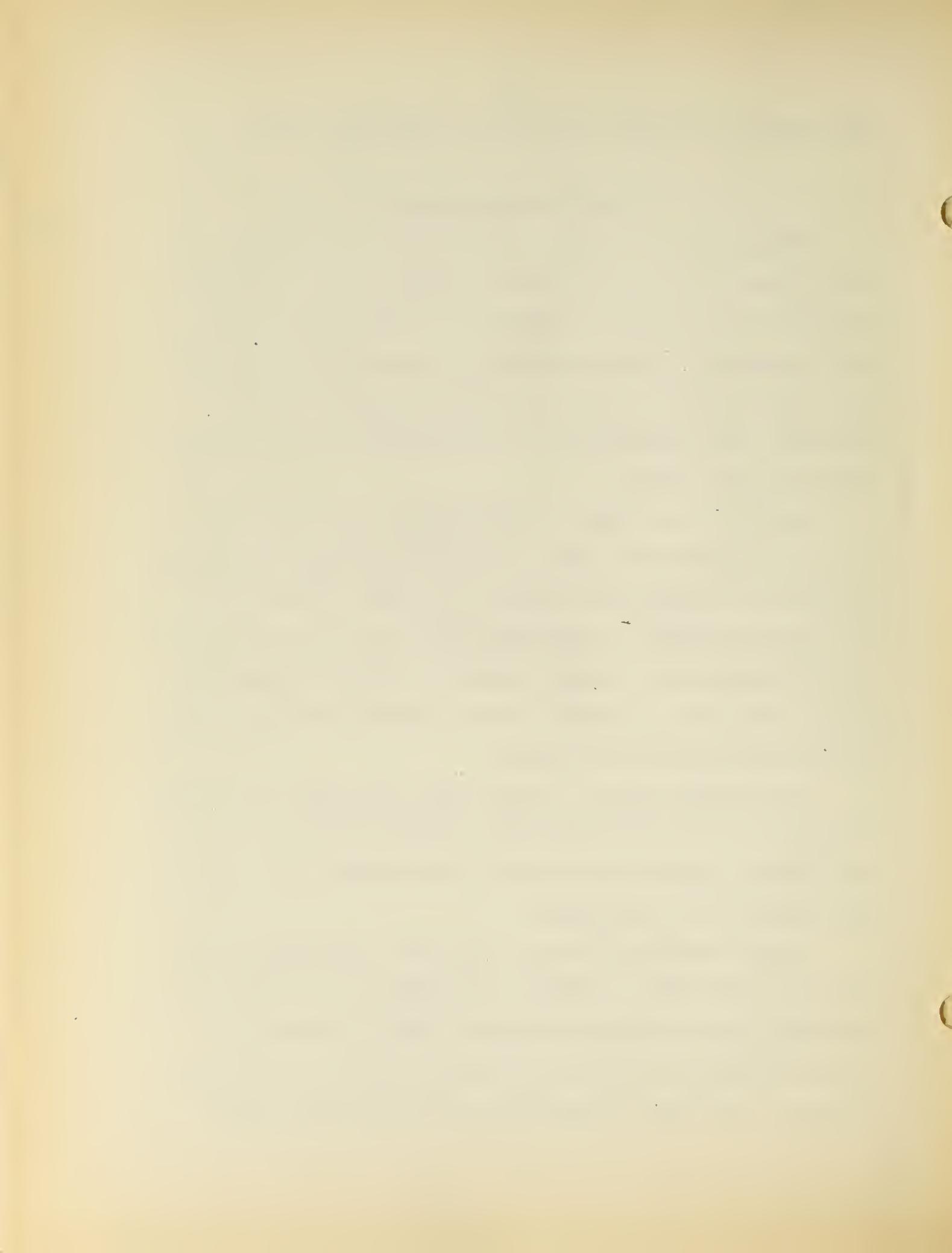
Notes on Noah's Plays

"She would be a Soldier, or the Plains of Chippewa" was first played at the Park Theatre, June 21, 1819. The play is based on the battle of Chippewa, at which the American army redeemed the earlier defeats of the Canadian campaign. The literary merit of the play does not measure up to Barker's, but nevertheless, it was successful and held the stage for many years.

"Marion, or the Hero of Lake George," was first performed on November 25, 1821, at the Park Theatre. The Battle of Saratoga furnished the basis of the play. The interest centers about Marion a patriotic leader, who is in constant peril throughout the piece, and who has several narrow escapes. The play was popular for ten years on the New York, Philadelphia, and Boston stages.

"The Grecian Captive, or the Fall of Athens," was written in 1822, and although based upon a foreign theme, it was prompted by sympathy on the part of an American for a country fighting for its independence.

Another significant writer of native plays during the period of 1805-1825, was Samuel Woodworth. He was born in Scituate, Massachusetts, January 13, 1785. After an apprenticeship in a printing office, he edited, and printed a paper at New Haven, Connecticut, in 1807, and in 1809



moved to New York where he conducted a weekly paper, *The Star*, during the war of 1812. He aided George P. Morris in 1823 in founding the New York Mirror. He is remembered mostly for his song "The Old Oaken Bucket." He died in New York in 1842.

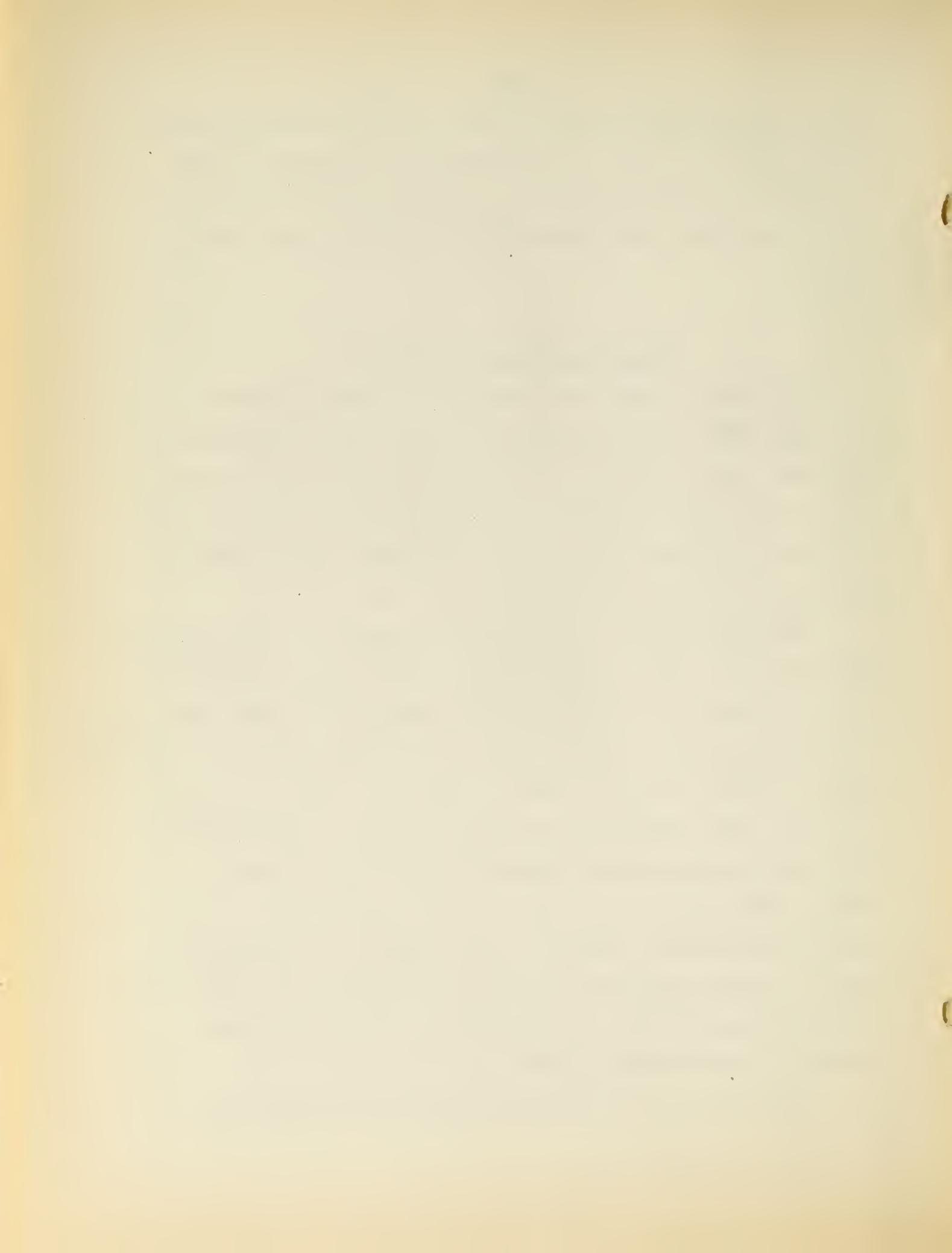
#### Notes on Woodworth's Plays

"The Deed of Gift," was acted at the Boston Theatre, March 25, 1822. It is a domestic drama, laid in Westchester, New York. The plot is of a conventional nature, being woven about a disinherited younger brother, a villainous elder, and a skillful sweetheart who, through a series of clever disguises, circumvents the villain.

"The Widow's Son, or Which is the Traitor," ranks next to "Andre" as the best of the Revolutionary plays of this period. It was produced at the Park Theatre, November 25, 1825, and is based upon one of these domestic tragedies which colored so darkly the Revolutionary period in New York. Quinn says of the play, "The characters are natural---and the conversations have an inherent interest which makes them very readable today. The play pictures well the bustle and confusion that marked the irregular warfare of that period of the Revolution, and the constant danger in which the characters move keeps the interest of the auditor stimulated by a clever use of the motive of self-preservation."<sup>1</sup>

"La Fayette, or the Castle of Olmuz," was first per-

1. Quinn, pages 157-158



formed at the Park Theatre, February 23, 1824. It was inspired by the approaching visit of Lafayette to this country. The play was repeated several times, and on September 9, it was performed with a great deal of ceremony in honor of Lafayette's actual visit. The play is the only significant play on the Lafayette motive, and is an interesting example of the dramatization of contemporary events.

Other native plays of the period, and their authors were:

"The Battle of New Orleans," written by C. E. Grice. This play was published in 1815, and was acted July 4, 1816, at the Park Theatre, New York.

"Battle of Eutaw Springs," written by William Ioor, was printed in 1807, and produced at the Old Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia on June 9, 1816.

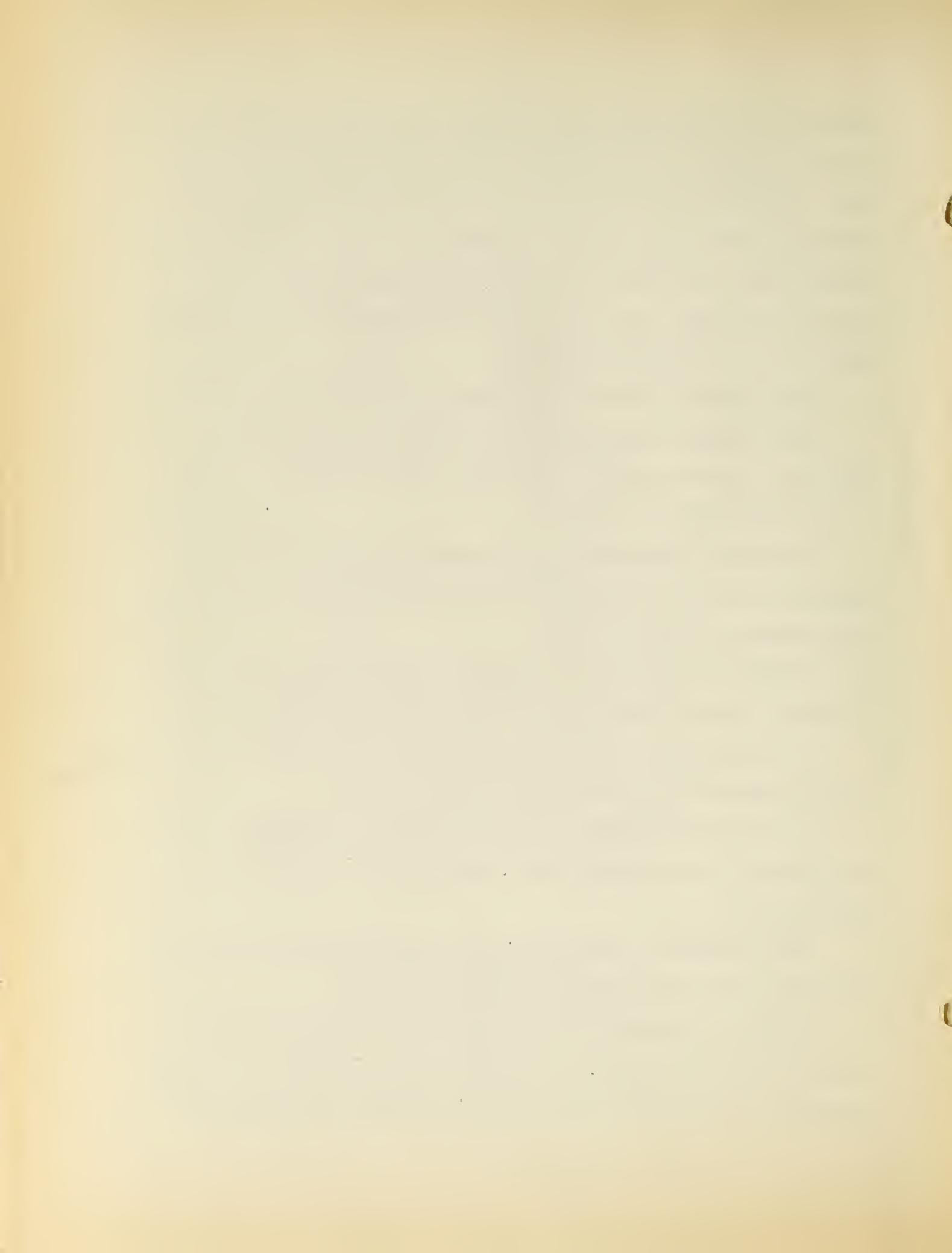
"A Tale of Lexington," written in four days by Samuel B. H. Judah, and performed at the Park Theatre on July 4, 1822.

"The Fox Chase," written by Charles Breck, and played at the Chestnut Street Theatre, April 9, 1806.

"Love and Friendship, or Yankee Notions," written by A. B. Lindsley, and produced during the season of 1807-8 at the Park Theatre.

"Blackbeard" a Farce written by Lemuel Sawyer, was published in 1824, and acted in New York in 1833.

It is not always that the American dramatist has made his name and his success on American soil. Thereofre, having considered the type of play written on native subjects, we

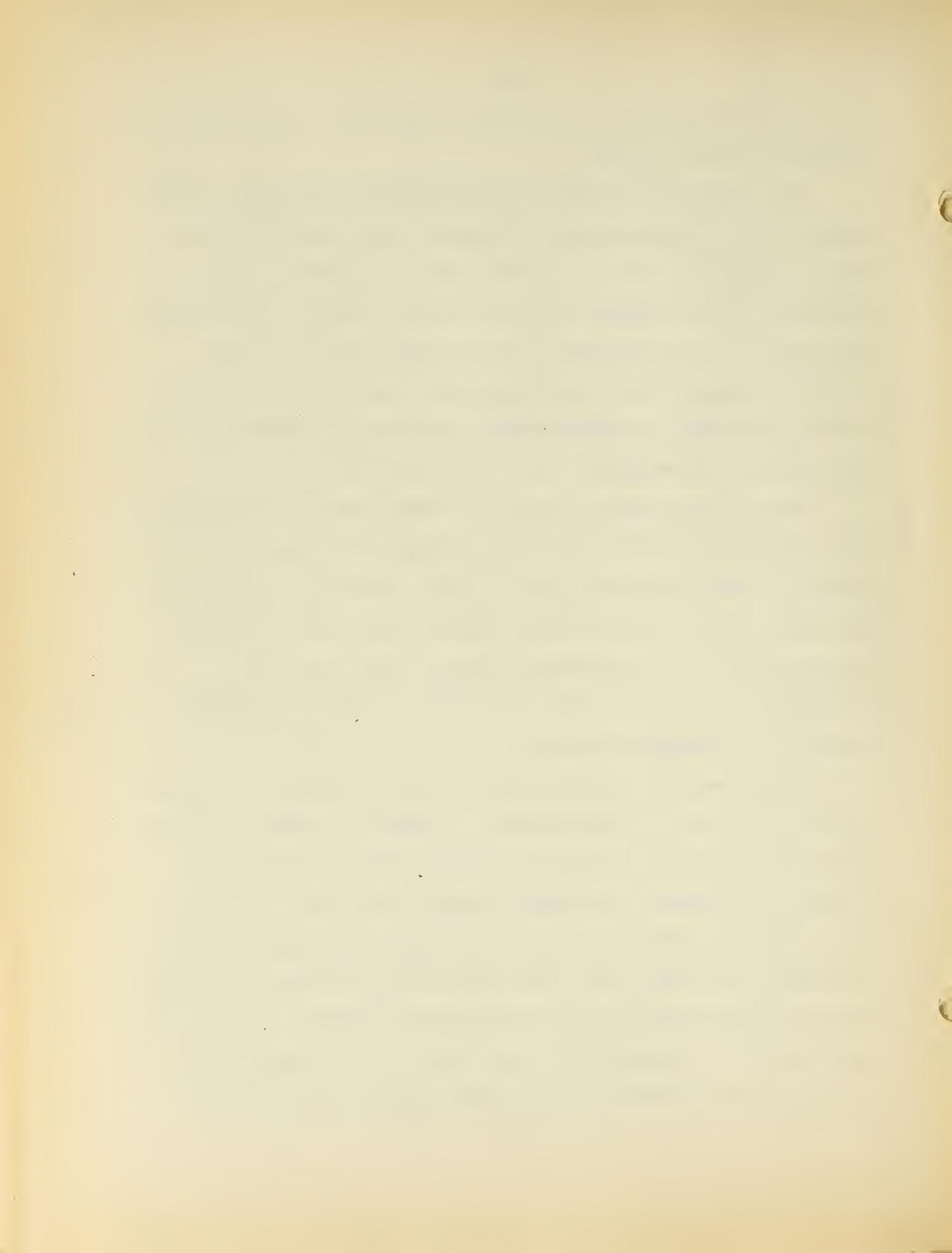


will turn our attention to that type which had for its inspiration foreign themes.

The leader of the group of playwrights, who chose foreign rather than native material for their plays, was John Howard Payne. Payne was born in New York City, on June 9, 1791. At an early age he developed a love for drama and for journalism. As a school boy, he edited a little paper, entitled "The Thespian Mirror," which was published in Wall Street. While at Union College, in Schenectady, New York, he started another periodical, The Pastime.

Despite the fact that Payne's father disliked the idea of his son being connected with the professional stage, the boy's talent in this direction began to show itself at an early age. His family tried to divert his interest away from the stage by putting him in a commercial house, where one of his brothers was a partner, but Payne still persisted in his inclination to become an actor.

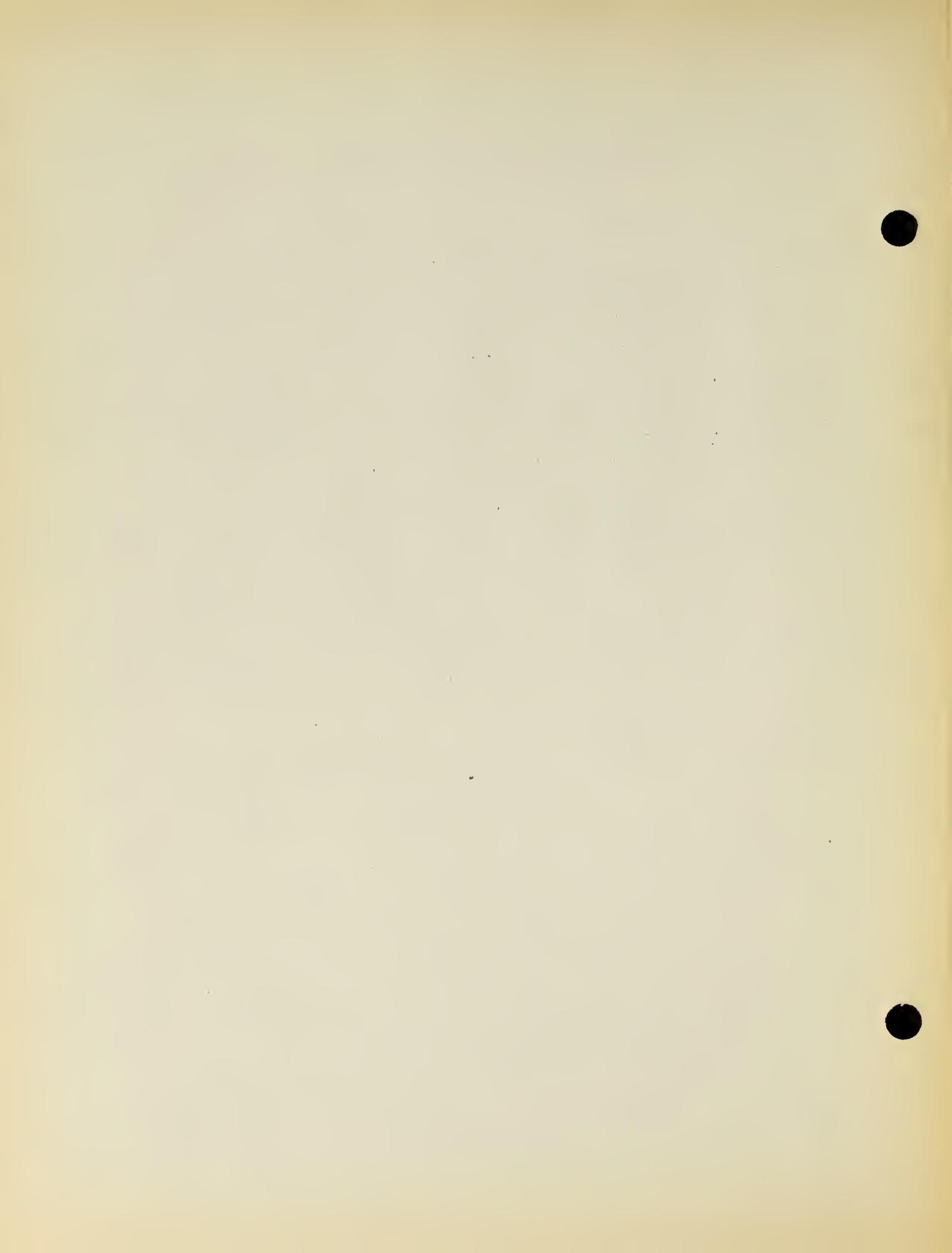
On February 24, 1809, Payne made his professional appearance in the role of Young Norval, in Hume's tragedy, "Douglas" at the Park Theatre, New York, and the press heralded him as a veritable "American Roscius." Family prejudice had by this time abated somewhat on account of family reverses, and it is recorded that during this first year of his professional work, Payne made an income of over ten thousand dollars. The public interest in him existed as long as his very striking appearance and youthfulness lasted. There came a time, however,



when, even though Payne made a considerable livelihood, he found that for him there was little hope for future advancement. For a time he retired from the stage. It was at this time that George Frederick Cooke arrived in America. He suggested to Payne that success awaited him across the seas. So he sailed on a packet ship for London, on January 17, 1813, to be gone many years.

He arrived on the other side when the theatres were in a very upset condition. Drury Lane and Covent Garden were both in precarious circumstances, and were continually at odds with each other. It was in this atmosphere of uncertain competition that Payne made his first appearance at Drury Lane, as Norval, on June 4, 1813. He was extremely successful. His success here, however, was surpassed in Liverpool and Dublin. He arrived in Paris during the excitement of the "Hundred Days" after Bonaparte's return from Elba. While in Paris he lived for a time with Washington Irving and made a friend of Talma, the great actor. Through Talma he received the freedom of the Theatre Francais, and he began a close study of the French drama, which later had much effect upon his own dramatic work.

Payne soon came to realize that he could advance himself no further than a certain point as an actor, so he turned his hand to literary work. He was, however, in no sense of the word a business man, and the managers always got the better of him. He literally sacrificed himself for their profit. He



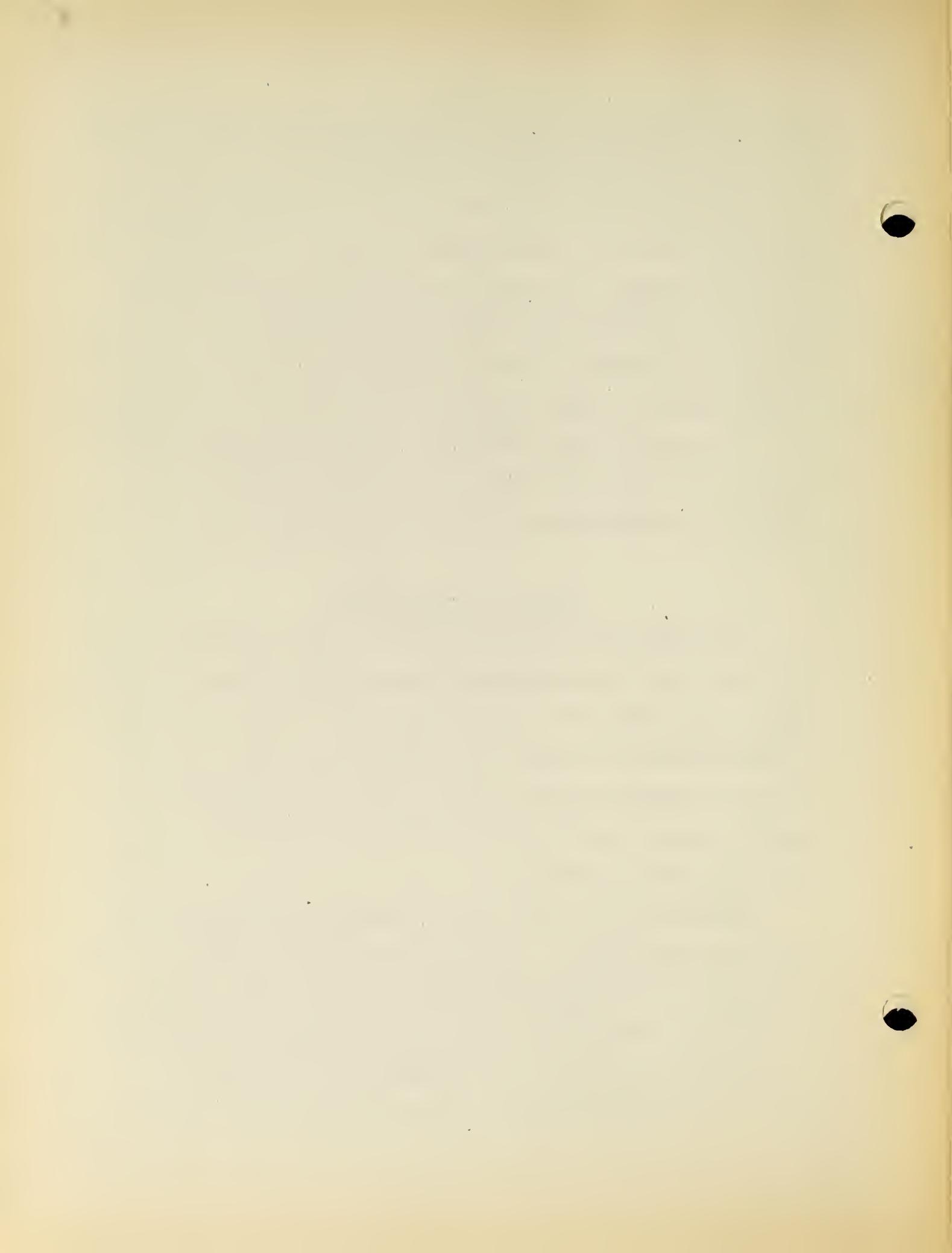
wrote for both Drury Lane and Covent Garden being brought over from one to the other by means of bribes.

Payne returned to New York on July 25, 1832, after having confined nearly his entire dramatic career to the stage history of London. At this time he turned his attention to politics. In 1840 he was appointed by President Tyler to the consulship of Tunis. He was recalled in 1845 but soon was re-appointed. He died, while his post as consul, on April 9, 1852. It was not until 1883 that his body was transferred to America, with national honor, and he was buried at Oak Hill Cemetery, in Washington, on June 9, of the same year.

#### Notes on Payne's Plays

"The Maid and the Magpie," was his first translation and was taken from "La Pie Valeuse," a melodrama by Louis Charles Caigniez and Jean Marie Theodore Baudouin. It was offered to Douglass Kinnaird, manager of Drury Lane, but that theatre had just accepted another version. The play was performed at Covent Garden, the rival London theatre, on September 15, 1815. It was not printed.

"Accusation, or the Family of D'Anglede," shows Payne's ability at adaptation. It was the result of an agreement with Kinnaird to adapt successful French plays for Drury Lane. The play was adapted from "Le Vol ou La Famille d'Anglede" by Frederic du Petit Mere, and was produced on February 1, at Drury Lane, and at the Park Theatre, New York, May 10, 1816.



The piece was successful on both British and American stages.

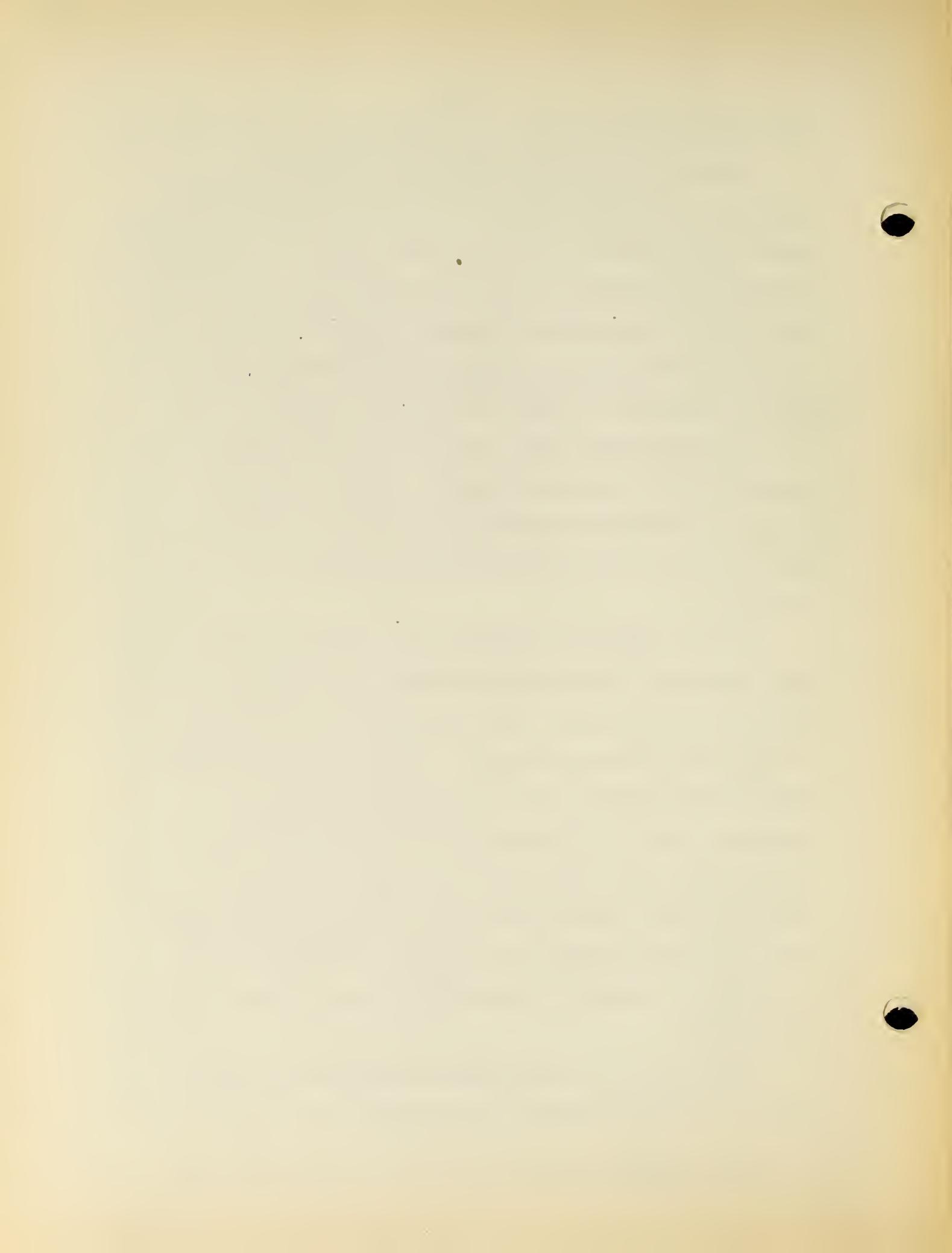
"Brutus, or the Fall of Tarquin," Payne's greatest tragedy, was first produced at Drury Lane, December 3, 1813, and ran for twenty-three consecutive nights. Due to previous holiday arrangements, it had to be put aside until January 13, 1813, when it ran for fifty-three consecutive nights. The piece was first played in America on March 15, 1819, at the Park Theatre, and it held the stage for seventeen years.

So instantaneous was the success of the play that the printer of the theatre hastened to buy the copyright from Payne, and proceeded immediately to set the text in type. Fry, writing for the New York Mirror, pictured the scene as follows:

"It was wished to publish it so instantaneously, that the manuscript was taken from the prompter during the performance, as fast as it was done with, to the printing office in the cellar under the stage. We have heard descriptions from Payne himself, of his astonishment when going down to correct a proof, at finding the whole Roman senate, with their togas thrown over their shoulders, busy, by grim torch light, setting types! During this hurry, it was thought expedient that the preface should be as brief as possible. There was no time for a distinct enumeration of the passages from other authors."<sup>1</sup>

This was one of the explanations given by Payne for the lack of explicit credit to his sources.

1. Moses, Representative Plays, (1815-1858), page 95.

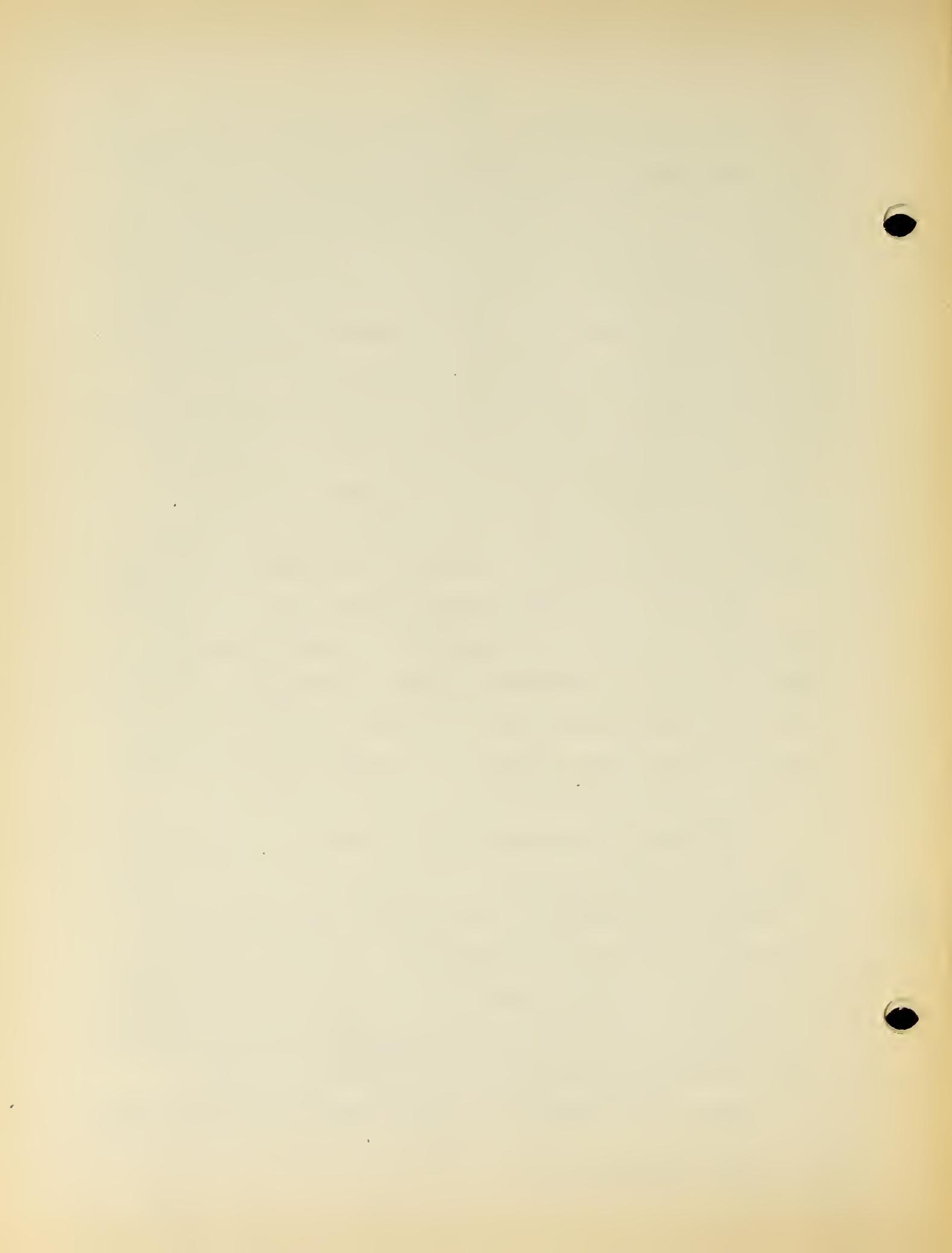


The leading character in the play is Brutus, the patriot. He is set against a background of lust and tyranny of which the Tarquins, Prince Sextus, Queen Tullia, and Tarquinia, the daughter of Lucius Tarquinius, are the chief representatives. On the side of Brutus the action is developed by his assumed foolishness, by Sextus's, rape of Lucrece, by vengeance taken by Brutus and Collatinus, her husband, which leads to the establishment of the Republic and the election of Brutus and Valerius as consuls. The tragedy is brought about by the treason of Titus, Brutus' son, who through his love for Tarquinia, aids her escape to the King's army, and is condemned to death by his own father, in his capacity as consul.

"Perhaps the dramatic sense of Payne shows nowhere so clearly as in the case of this play. "Brutus" revealed Payne's ability as a moulder of stage characters, as constructor of effective scenes, and as a selector, from among a wealth of historical tradition and earlier dramatic efforts, of the essential elements in a tragic scene."<sup>1</sup>

"Therese," an adaptation of "Therese ou l'Orpheline de Geneve," by Victor Ducaque, was produced with great success at Drury Lane, February 2, 1821, and at the Anthony Street Theatre, New York, on April 30. Payne improved the play by cutting down the long speeches of the French melodrama, and substituting shorter and crisper sentences. In this way the action was made more rapid and the effect heightened.

"Charles the Second, or the Merry Monarch," Payne's best



comedy, first played at Covent Garden, May 27, 1824, and at the Park Theatre, October 24, 1824. The play was adapted from "La Jeunesse de Henri V" by Alexandre Duval. It shared popular favor with "Brutus," and held the stage for many years. The piece was rapid in action, and compact and unified in structure. There was also in it the tone of high comedy, so often attempted and so hard to reach.

Payne wrote numerous other plays, several of which, however, have come down to the present day only by title.

Other plays of the period, which were based on foreign themes, and their authors were:

"Foscari or the Venetian Exile"; "The Mysteries of the Castle, or the Victim of Revenge," performed at the Charlston Theatre in 1806; and "The Forgers," performed at the Charleston Theatre 1825-26, all by John Blakewhite.

"The Gordian Knot, or Causes and Effects," written in 1807 by Isaac Harby, and performed at the Charleston Theatre in 1810.

"The Corsair," by Edward Clifford Holland, played in Charleston in 1818.

"Rudolph, or the Robbers of Calabria," by John D. Turnbull, first performed at the Boston Theatre and published in 1807.

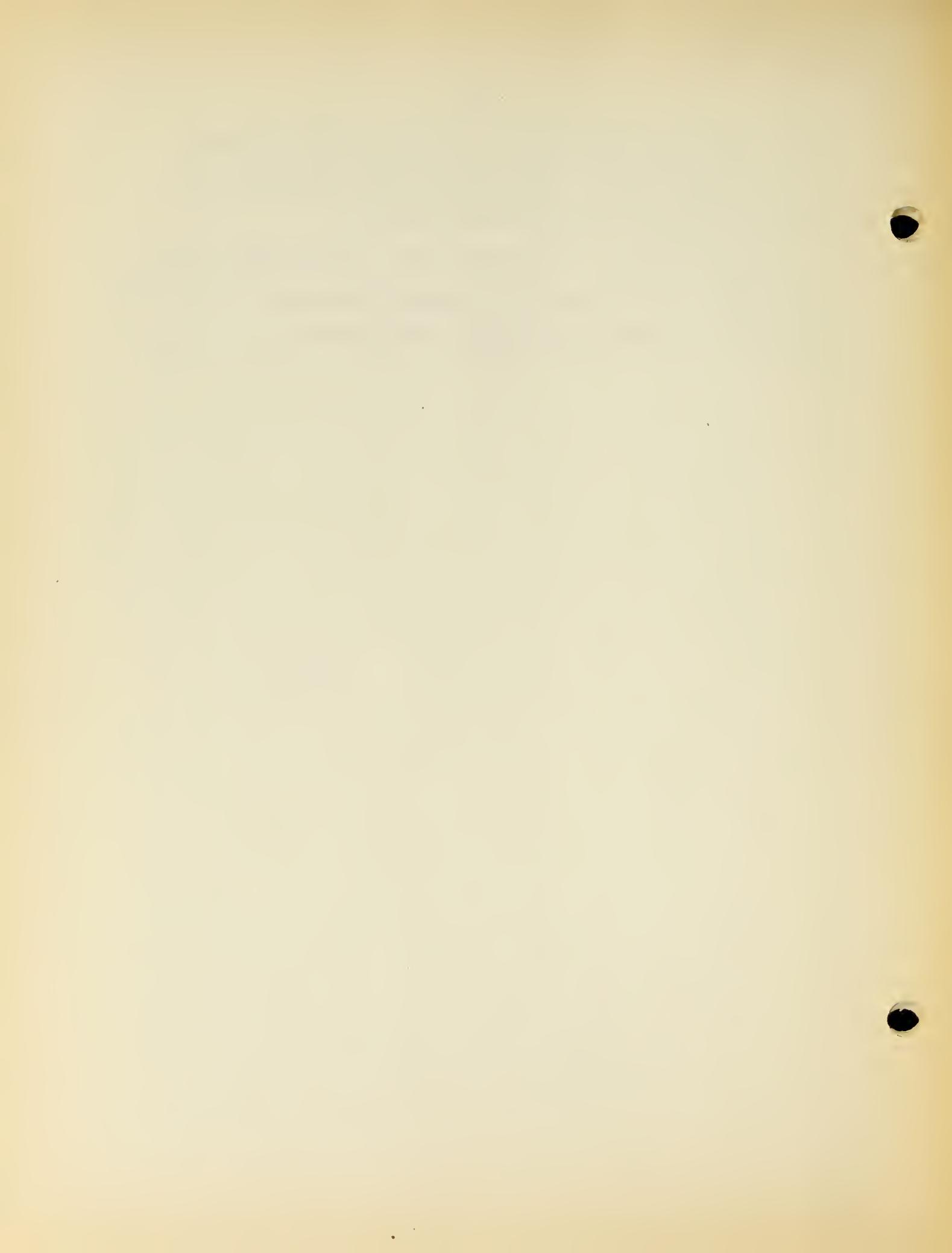
"The Mountain Torrent," by Samuel B. H. Judah, performed at the Park Theatre, March, 1820.

"Paul and Alexis, or Orphans of the Rhine," by Mordecai



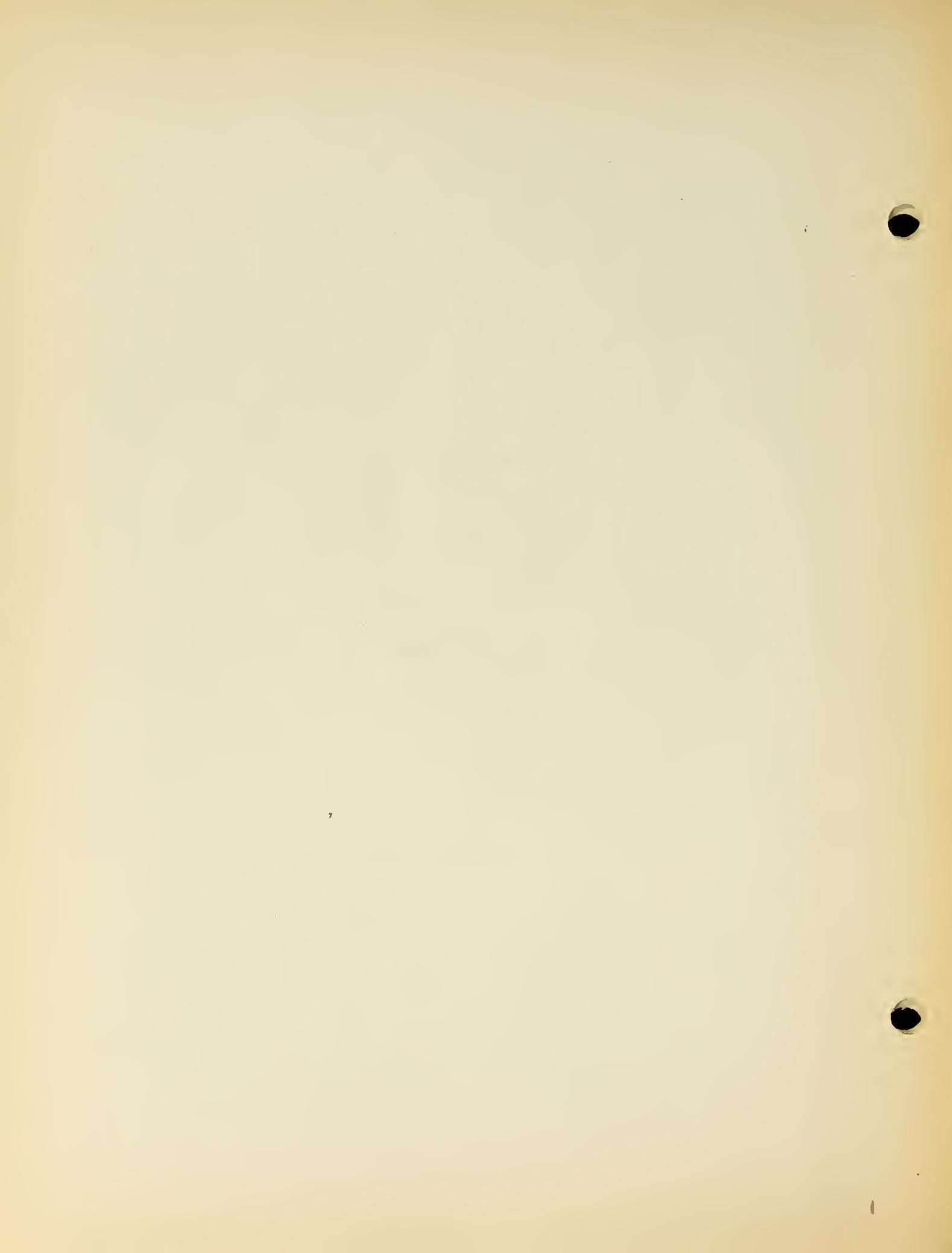
Noah, written in Charleston in 1812, and later played at Covent Garden and the Park Theatre under the title "The Wandering Boys, or the Castle of Olival."

Our treatment of the native and foreign themes being completed, we now turn to the romantic play, and look at its rise and development during the next quarter of a century.



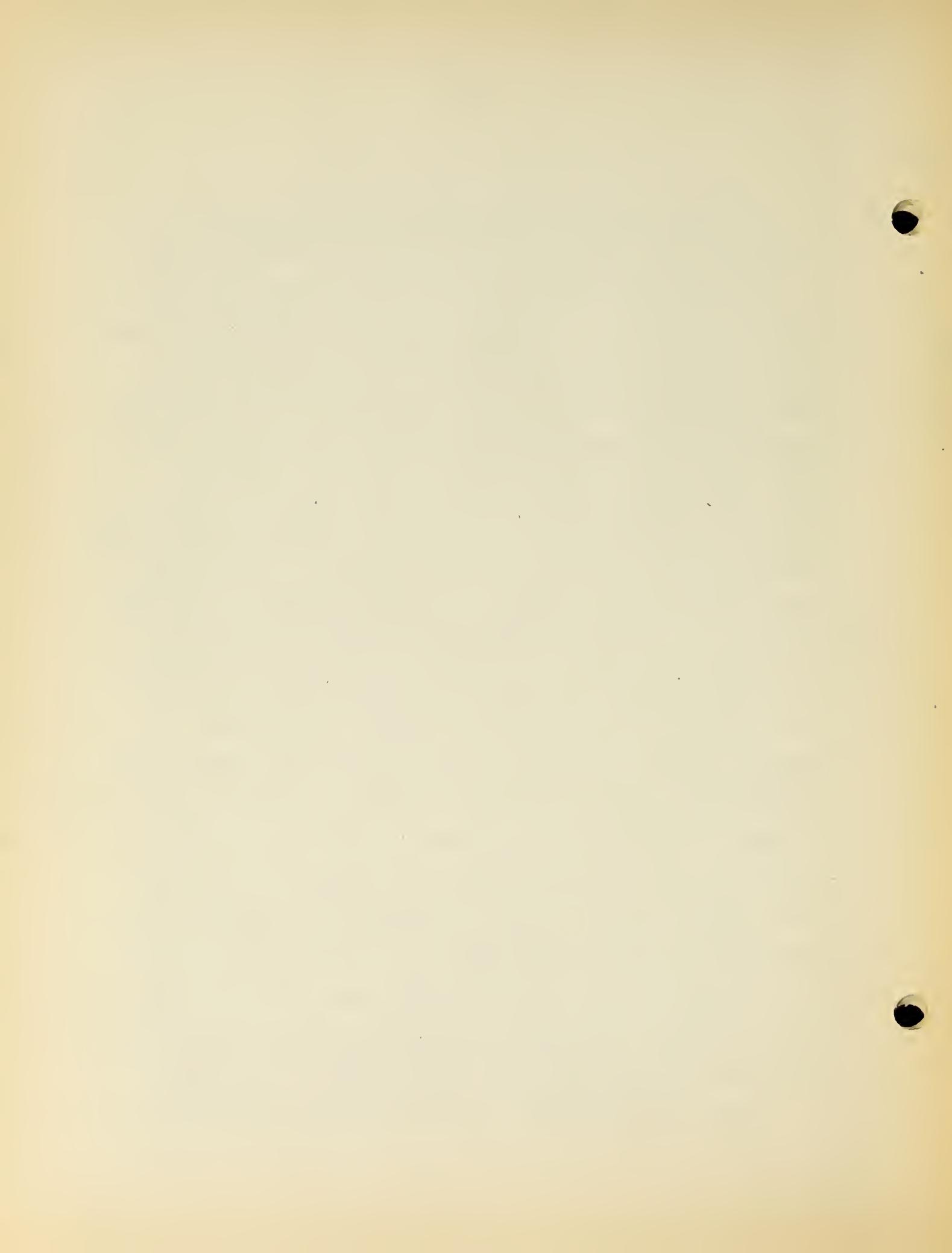
CHAPTER V

ROMANTIC DRAMA



The term "romantic" has been, in a literary sense, used in various ways. Much confusion has been caused by the use of the term to describe both the material selected and the method of treatment of that material. If the term "romantic" could be confined to the selection of material and in that field be contrasted with the term "classic," while the terms "realistic" and "idealistic" could be applied to the treatment, clarity would be secured and some of our literary tendencies and movements would be better understood. Romantic material may be treated either realistically or idealistically. There is no necessary antagonism between romance and realism. The essence of romance is freedom from restraint. The writer chooses his theme without restriction of place or time. In the treatment of his material, the romantic dramatist, would be wise to treat a motive which would be of universal appeal to the imagination of his audience. Such motives as self-preservation, love of sex, family affection, love of country, religious feeling and personal honor have this universal appeal. Because he was able to mingle these motives in a natural development so as to bring the largest number into conflict with each other, and at the same time cause a probable conclusion to be reached, Robert Montgomery Bird marks a decided advance in the progress of our drama.

Robert Montgomery Bird was born in Newcastle, Delaware,



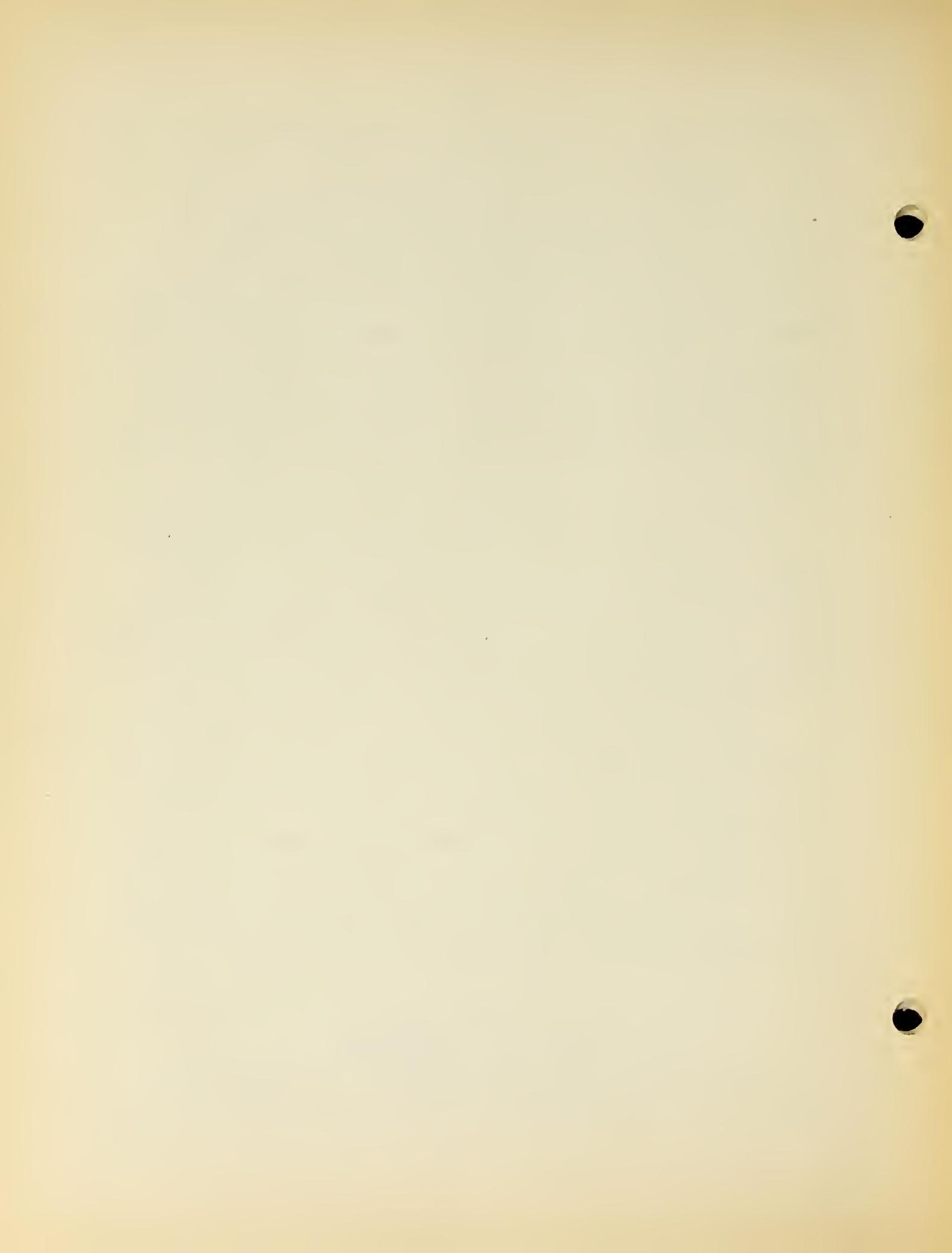
February 5, 1806. He was the son of the Honorable John Bird a man of standing and of some literary taste. Following the death of his father, Bird was brought up by his maternal uncle, Nicholas van Dyke, in an atmosphere of culture and achievement. He attended the Germantown Academy at Philadelphia, and later matriculated in the School of Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania. He received his degree in medicine in April 1827, and began to practice in Philadelphia. However, he soon abandoned the profession in favor of literature.

While he was still a medical student, Bird was writing plays. He also contributed verse and prose to the "Philadelphia Monthly Magazine" during 1827-28. Bird wrote many plays, but abandoned his career of a playwright in 1840 due to his disappointment at the financial returns.

The latter part of Bird's life was taken up by farming, journalism, and politics. He was editor and part proprietor of the "North American" in Philadelphia, and took an active interest in Whig politics, especially in Delaware, his native state. He was a delegate to the National Whig Convention of 1844, and declined nomination to both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Bird died January 23, 1854.

#### Notes on Bird's Plays

"It Was All for the Best," a comedy, was Bird's first play, and was written in 1827. It's only a wit was that it



was written to be acted by definite persons, which shows that, from the start, Bird wrote with an eye to stage presentation.

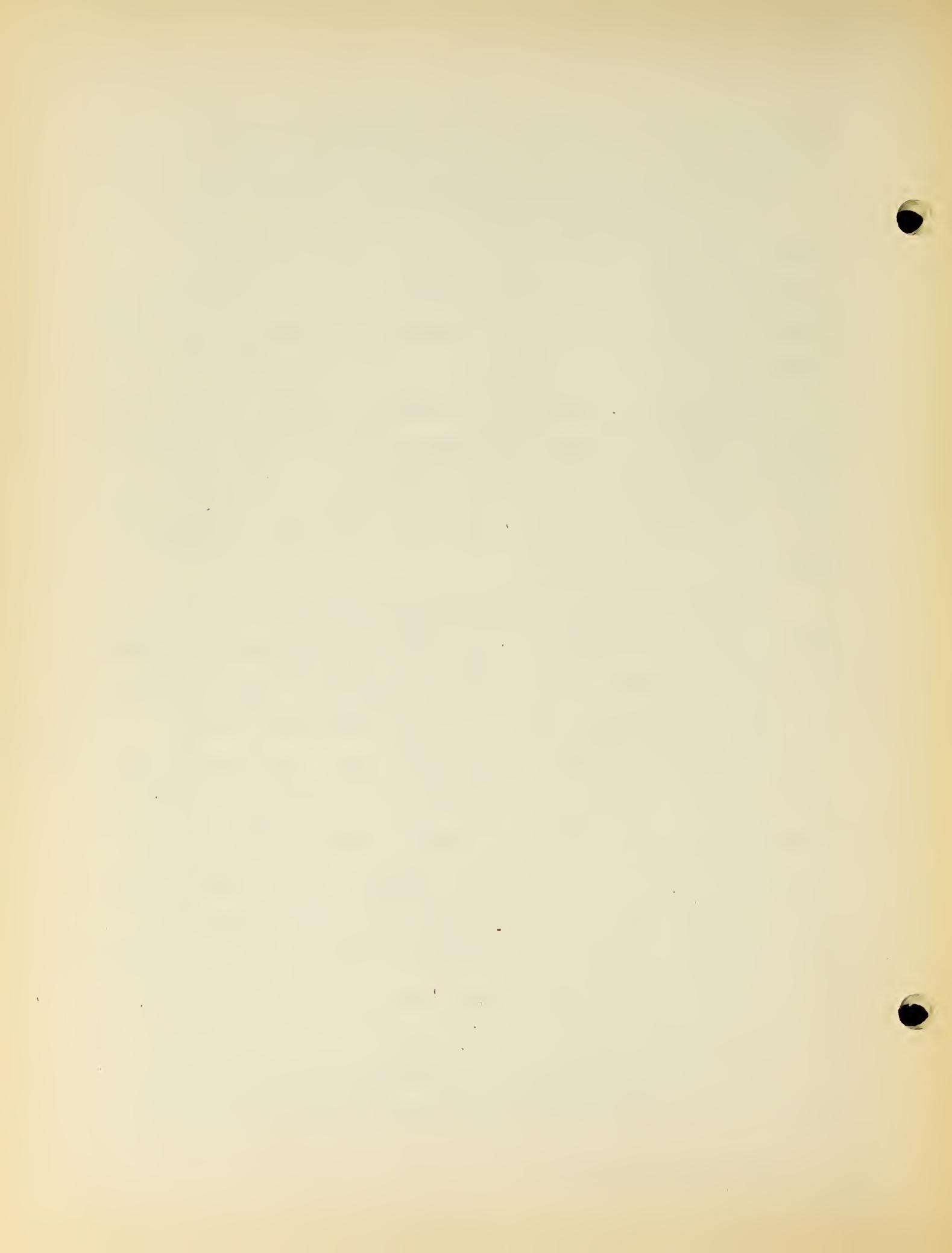
"The Coaled Lover," and "Caridorf," also written in 1827, were romantic tragedies. These plays were really preparation for later plays but even in these the power of imagination and directness of expression, of Bird, were visible.

"The City Looking Glass," a comedy, written in 1828, the scene of which is laid in Philadelphia, is an early example of the treatment of low life in a large city. There are many surprises in the play, and also a great deal of amusing reported.

"Pelopidas," one of Bird's best drams, was written in 1830. It is an historical play, based upon Plutarch's account of Pelopidas. Bird took the general situation from Plutarch, but departed, to some extent, from his story in order to insert a dramatic motive. The play is not a tragedy, for the main motive, namely love of country, is successful over the counteraction of the tragic motive. "The characters of Pelopidas, Philotas, Spolla, and Archias are well drawn. The nature of Pelopidas, brave and rash, and that of Philotas, calm and self-contained, the cynical nature of Leonidas, and above all, the very feminine character of Spolla rest in clearly in the memory."<sup>1</sup>

"The Gladiator," was first performed on September 26, 1831. It contained both the good points and faults of roman-

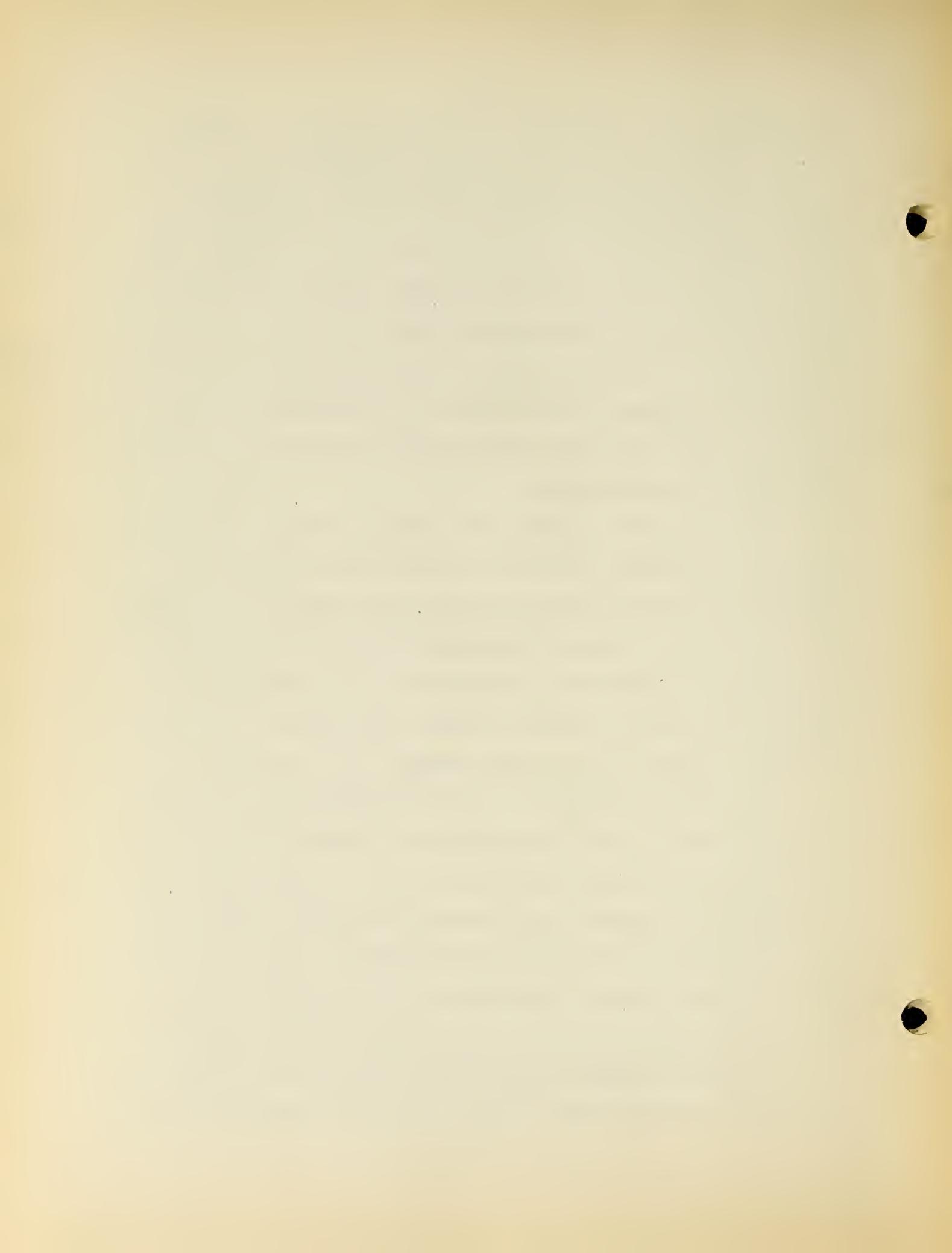
1. Quinn, pages 228-229



tic tragedy. The play was an immediate success. Hundreds failed to gain access to the house on the first night, and the play was started on the career that was to make it the most successful performed in the country up until that time. The main facts Bird took from Plutarch, Appian, Herodotus, and Hooke. However, he uses historic facts only as an inspiration, taking, at the same time, certain liberties with history in order to produce a human document. The piece is claimed to have been the only drama performed one thousand times within the lifetime of the author.

"Oralloo sa," a tragedy, the scene of which was taken from South America, was first played at the Arch Street Theatre, October 10, 1832. The play as a dramatic piece did not measure up to either "The Gladiator" or "Pelopidas." There was a decided lack of humanity in the character of Oralloossa, and his dominant traits, treachery, and deceipts, failed to speak, to any great degree, to an audience.

"The Brother of Bogota," written for Edward Forrest, was first produced at the Bowery Theatre on February 12, 1834. It was, without doubt, Bird's best play. The scene was laid in Santa Fe de Bogota; the time was not clearly indicated, but was probably in the eighteenth century. The play was true to human nature. The situation is a domestic one, namely, a father's love for his child en. Quina says, "In 'The Brother of Bogota,' Bird made domestic drama heroic. For the sentimentality which dominates plays like 'The Stranger,'



Bird substituted the pathos that springs from the yearning of a father over his erring son, who had been 'the first love of his mother,' and it is the naturalness of Feoro, his simplicity, and the way he remains true to his middle-class standards, that secure our sympathy. When he attacks Caberero, he fights with the weapon of his class, his money. When his daughter is to be the wife of a noble gentleman, he rejoices. Yet he is the pride of his own caste, too, and his dignity never entirely leaves him, even in distress."<sup>1</sup> The piece was one of Edwin Forrest's favorite plays, and was performed by him until the last year of his stage appearance.

In addition to the above mentioned plays, Bird wrote several others, and also was the author of five novels, which he wrote between the years 1834 and 1839.

The rivalry between theatres in Philadelphia encouraged a group of men to write plays. Although Bird was the most significant of these playwrights, there were others who aided greatly in the advancement of the drama. The best work was done in the field of the romantic play, usually with its roots in history, ancient and medieval. "The Usurper," by Dr. James McHenry, marked the earliest attempt to place Irish history on the stage. The play was produced at the Chestnut Street theatre, December 26, 1827.

Another playwright of the Philadelphia group was David Paul Brown, a distinguished member of the Philadelphia bar. Brown was born in Philadelphia, on September 28, 1795. His

1. Quinn, page 243.



education was marked by the classical thoroughness of the time. He began the study of medicine, at the age of seventeen, under Dr. Benjamin Rush. The doctor's death, however, terminated his ambitions in that direction, and it was not long before he was reading law with William Rawle. In September, 1816, he passed his examinations, for the bar, and there followed a long legal career, during which he occupied important posts in the Supreme Court of his native state, as well as of the United States.

Writing was an easy accomplishment with Brown, and by the time of his marriage to Emilie Catharine Hardy, in 1824, he had gained fame as a graceful and gifted writer. Because of this, Brown was selected to present an address to Lafayette when he visited Philadelphia in 1824. Beside writing plays, Brown also contributed to magazines, and reviewed books. The major portion of his time, however, was taken up by his practice of law. He died in 1875.

#### Notes on Brown's Plays

"Sertorius, or the Roman Patriot," a tragedy, was written in 1830, and was accepted for presentation by Junius Brutus Booth. It was produced at the Chestnut Street Theatre on December 14, 1830, with Booth in the title role. The scene of the play was laid in Spain during the Roman Republic, and was concerned with the victory of Sertorius over Pompey and Metellus and his death at the hands of Porsenna and other conspirators who were jealous of his great power over the ~~people~~.



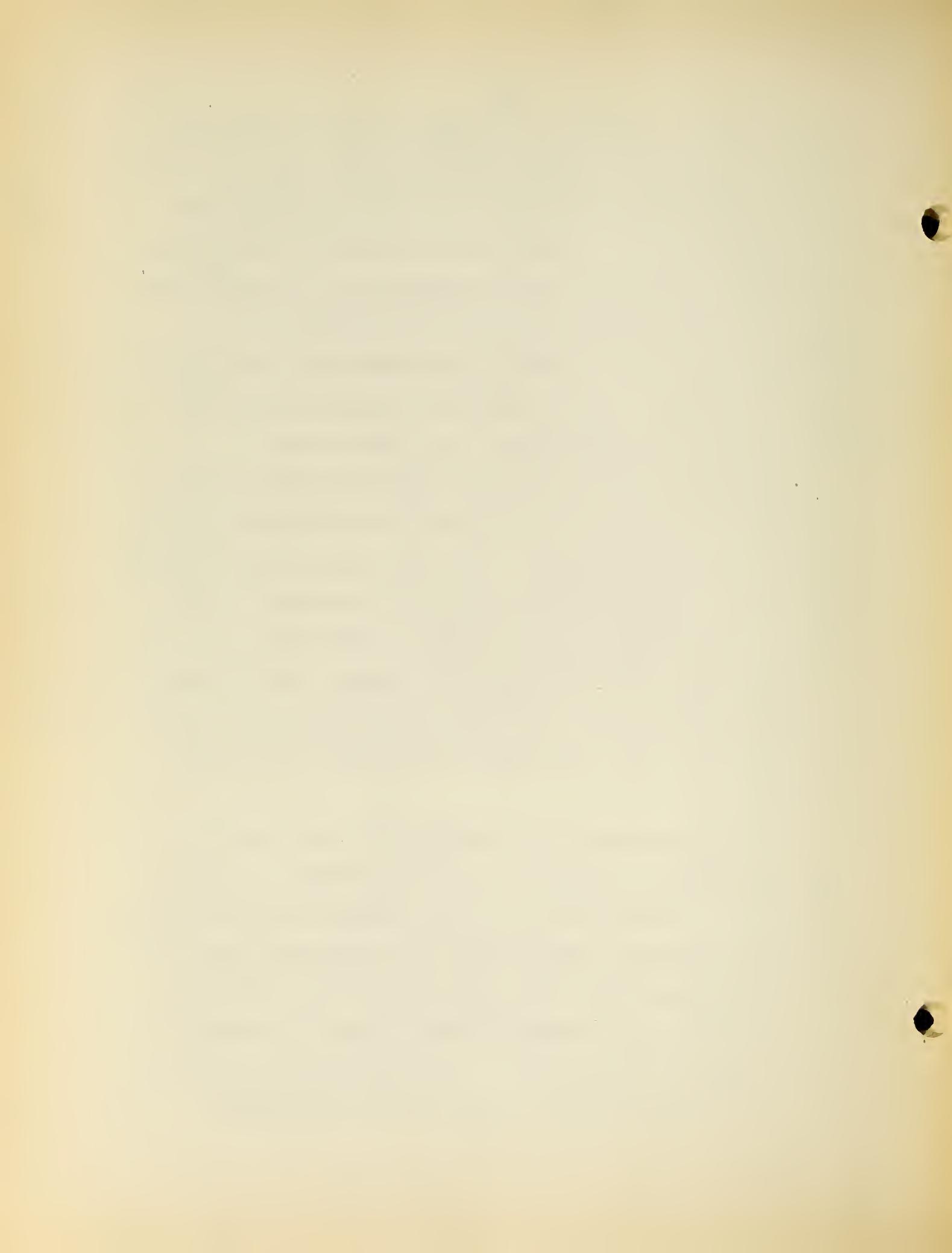
people of Spain. The piece was revived several times, and whenever Booth played the leading role he met with much success. Wenyss say, "The beautiful poetry of this play flowed from his lips, and must have gratified the fastidious taste of any author--how, then, must it have delighted the audience! The play wanted action--there was too much declamation."<sup>1</sup> "Sertorius" is true to history, being based upon Plutarch's life of that hero. In the history of American drama it is important only as illustrative of the closet drama.

"The Prophet of St. Paul's," a romantic comedy, was written in 1830, but was not performed until March 20, 1837, at the Walnut Street Theatre. The plot evolves about a royal love affair. The play was not given the treatment it deserved, being butchered by the company which acted it.

Brown also wrote "The Trial," a tragedy; and a farce entitled "Love and Honour; or The Generous Soldier." These plays, however, were never acted, and probably were never published.

John Augustus Stone, whose best work in the field of drama was done in connection with the development of the Indian play, contributed also to the romantic historical drama during his brief and tragic career as a playwright, which was spent in Philadelphia. He is known to have written seven plays, but only one, "Tancred, or the Seige of Antioch," has survived in complete form. This piece was written in the form of a chronicle play, and dealt with the Christian

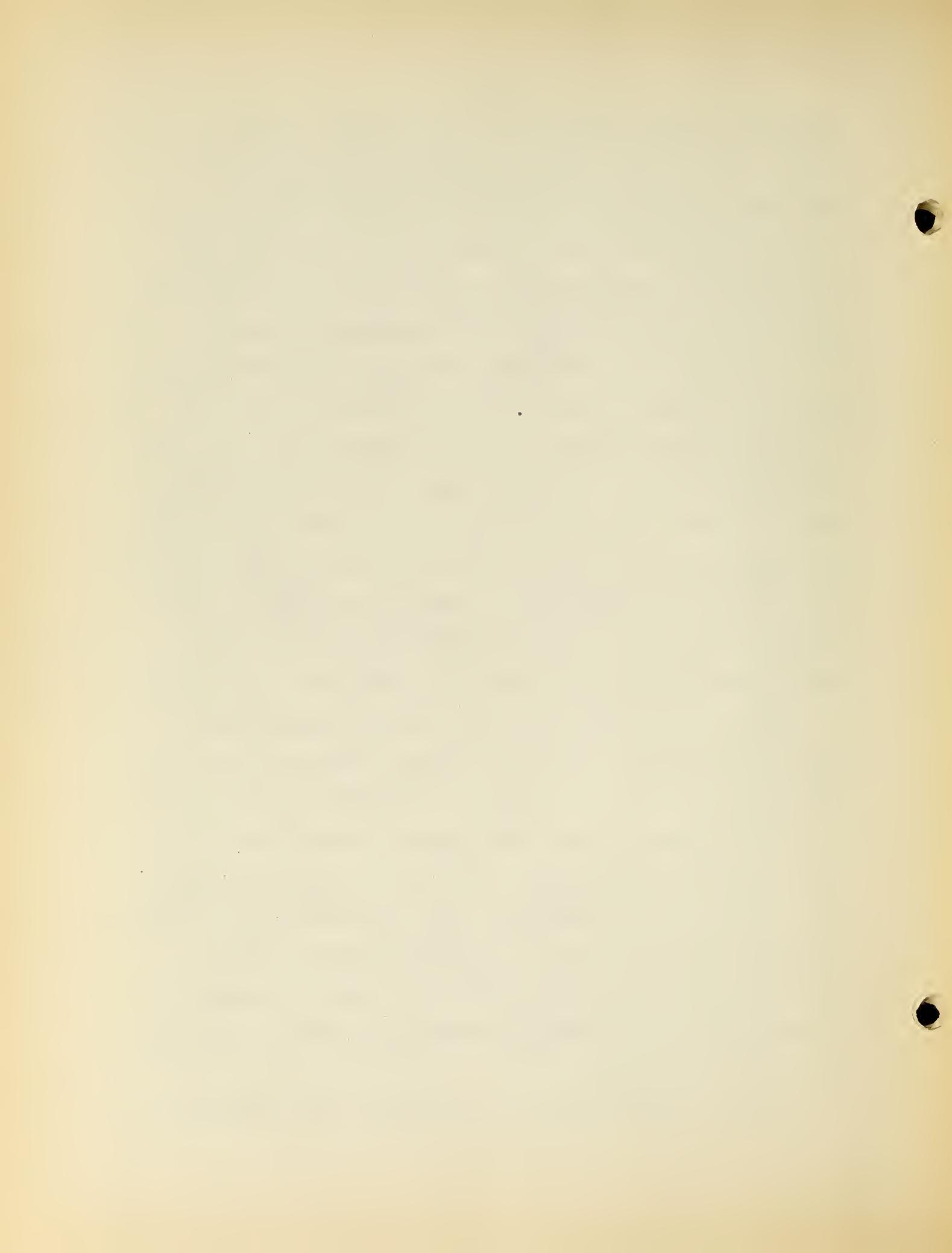
1. Moses, Representative Plays, (1815-1858), page 182.



attack upon Antioch during the First Crusade. There is no record that the play was ever acted. It is known, however, that two of Stone's plays were acted. "Tancred, or the King of Sicily," was played at the Park Theatre, March 16, 1831. And "The Ancient Briton," which was written for Forrest, was performed at the Arch Street Theatre, March 27, 1833.

One of the most significant writers of the Philadelphia group was Robert T. Conrad. Conrad was born in 1810, and by the time he was twenty-two he was writing plays. He was educated for the bar and early began to interest himself in local politics. He had read law with his uncle, but instead of immediately going into practice, he satisfied his interest in journalism, by publishing the "Daily Commercial Intelligencer," later known as the "Philadelphia Gazette." His health, however, could not stand the strain of journalism, so he turned to the practice of law. He was soon appointed Recorder of the City, and after holding office for about two weeks, was elevated to the position of Judge of the Court of Criminal Sessions. Later, he was given a position on the bench in the Court of General Sessions. In June, 1854, the city and county of Philadelphia, being consolidated, he became the Mayoralty candidate for the American party, and was elected by an overwhelming majority. In 1856, Governor Pollock appointed Conrad Judge of Quarter Sessions. He died two years later, in 1858.

Conrad's first play, entitled "Conrad, King of Naples,"



has not survived. It was written for James E. Murdock, who at that time was a rising young star. The play was produced successfully at the Arch Street Theatre on January 17, 1832.

The most important of Conrad's plays was "Jack Cade," a tragedy centering upon the Kentish rebellion of 1450, which had a man named Jack Cade for a leader. The play was first written for A. A. Addams, and was announced for December 7, 1835, at the Walnut Street Theatre. However, when the time for the performance arrived, Addams was too intoxicated to appear, so it was postponed until December 9, when David Ingersoll played the part. Conrad later rewrote the play for Forrest, who produced it at the Park Theatre, May 24, 1841. The piece was played as late as August 29, 1887, when Edmund K. Collier produced it at the Third Avenue Theatre in New York. The following is a review of the play.

"The revolt had in reality a political rather than a social or economic basis, but Conrad rightly judged that personal oppression of serfs and yeoman would form a better dramatic motive than the struggle for political rights and freedom of elections, which are contained in the historical 'Complaint of the Commons of Kent.' Jack Cade becomes, therefore, the symbol of rebellion against the arbitrary power of the nobles, represented by Lord Say, while the starvation of the peasants, the attacks upon Marianne, Cade's wife, and the violent prevention of the marriage of Kate Worthy and Will Mowbray by Lord Say, in order that his tool Courtney



may posses Kate, are transferred from an earlier state of affairs to the time of the play. Cade takes the name of Mortimer and is believed to be the real heir to the English throne. His uprising is successfull and he seizes London, Henry VI flying to Kenilworth. Lord Say is stabbed by Cade, but revenges himself by a blow with his poison dagger. Mariamne, who has been crazed by grief at the loss of their child and by shock after she has killed Lord Clifford in defense of her honor, dies first, and the play ends with Will Mowbray waving the 'charter' which frees the bondmen of England and which existed  
only on the stage.<sup>1</sup>"

Until about the middle of the nineteenth century, the romantic play voiced protest against the aristocracy. However, at this time it turned in a different direction, and in the work of one of our greatest dramatists we find depicted the tragedy of the patrician. This playwright was George Henry Boker. Boker was born in Philadelphia, October 6, 1825. He was brought up in an atmosphere of ease and refinement, and received his preparatory education in private schools. In 1839 he entered the College of New Jersey, as Princeton was then called, and was graduated in 1842. Two years later, Boker married Miss Julia Mandeville Riggs, of Georgetown, District of Columbia. He studied law but never practiced, preferring to devote his time to writing.

The year 1848 was outstanding for Boker. It witnessed the publication of his first volume of verse, "The Lessons of



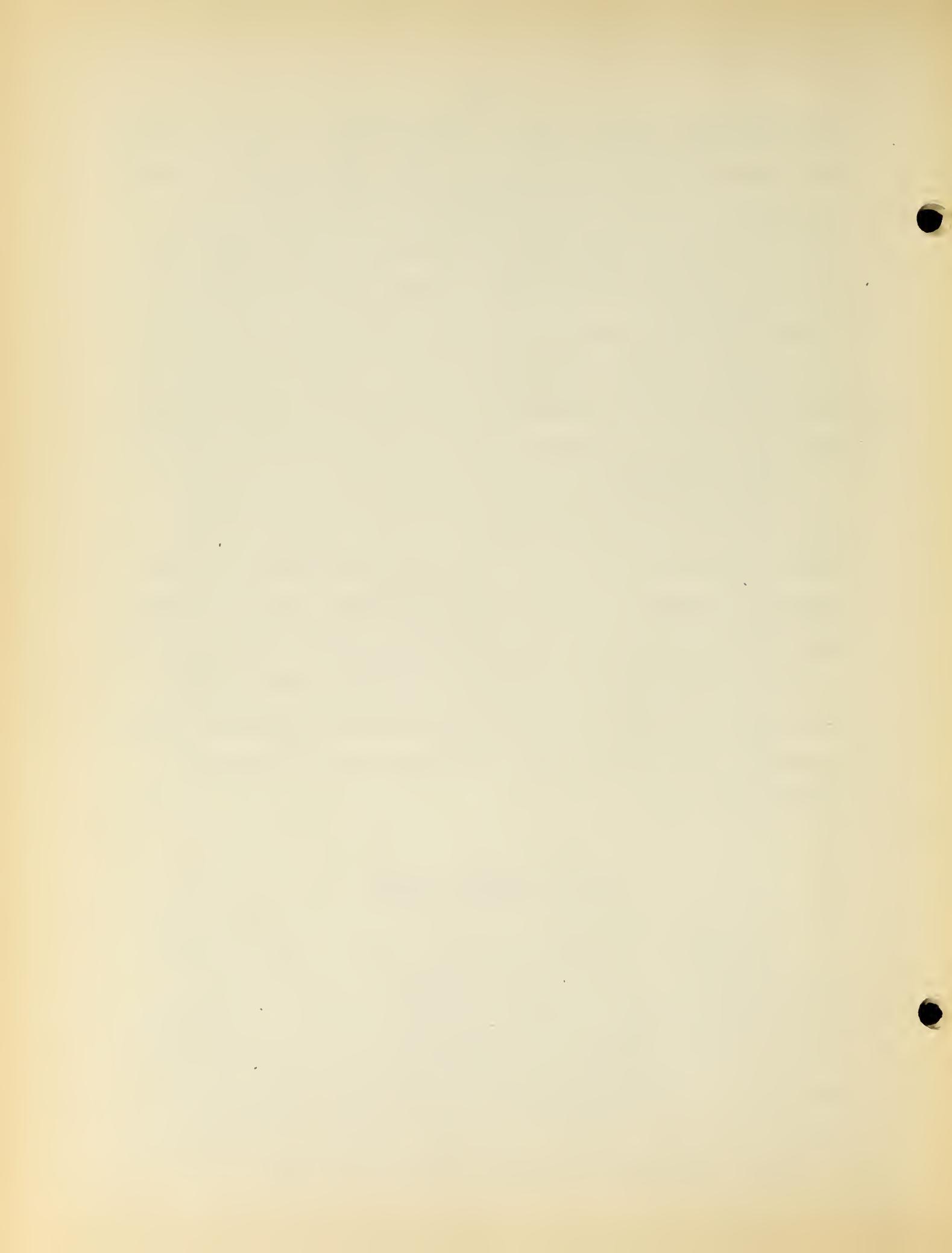
Life, and other poems," and it introduced him to Bayard Taylor and to R. H. Stoddard. Of the occasion, Taylor wrote: "Young Boker, author of the tragedy 'Calaynos,' a most remarkable work, is here on a visit and spent several hours tonight with me. He is another hero--a most notable, glorious mortal! He is one of our band, and is, I think, destined to high renown as an author. He is nearly my own age, perhaps a year or two older, and has lived through the same sensations, fought the <sup>1</sup> same fight, and now stands up with the same defiant spirit."

Boker in addition to writing, was also interested in politics. The Civil War changed him from a Democrat to a staunch Republican. In 1871, he was sent by President Grant to Constantinople, as United States Minister. He remained at Constantinople for four years, following which he was promoted to the post of Minister to Russia. In 1878, Boker withdrew from diplomatic life, and returned to the United States, where he resumed his literary work. He died January 2, 1890, in Philadelphia.

#### Notes o Boker's Plays

"Calaynos," a tragedy, was Boker's first play and was written in 1848. It was first produced in London at the Sadler's Wells Theatre on May 10, 1849, without the author's consent and with considerable alteration. The play was first performed in this country at the Walnut Street Theatre, on January 20, 1851. The plot was built around the hatred which

1. Moses, Representative Plays, (1856-1911), p.77



the Spaniards bore for persons of Moorish ancestry. The piece was written in blank verse, and was good from a structural point of view.

"Anne Boleyn," was Boker's second play. He intended the play for the stage, but it was never performed. It was written in 1849.

"The Betrothal," a comedy, was written in 1850, and was first played at the Walnut Street Theatre on September 25, 1850. The scene of the play was laid in Tuscany. The plot was an old favorite, and centered about the efforts of a mother to marry her daughter to a rich merchant, in order to replenish the family fortunes. The play was an improvement over the first two, having decidedly more action and dominating characters who carried the plot along.

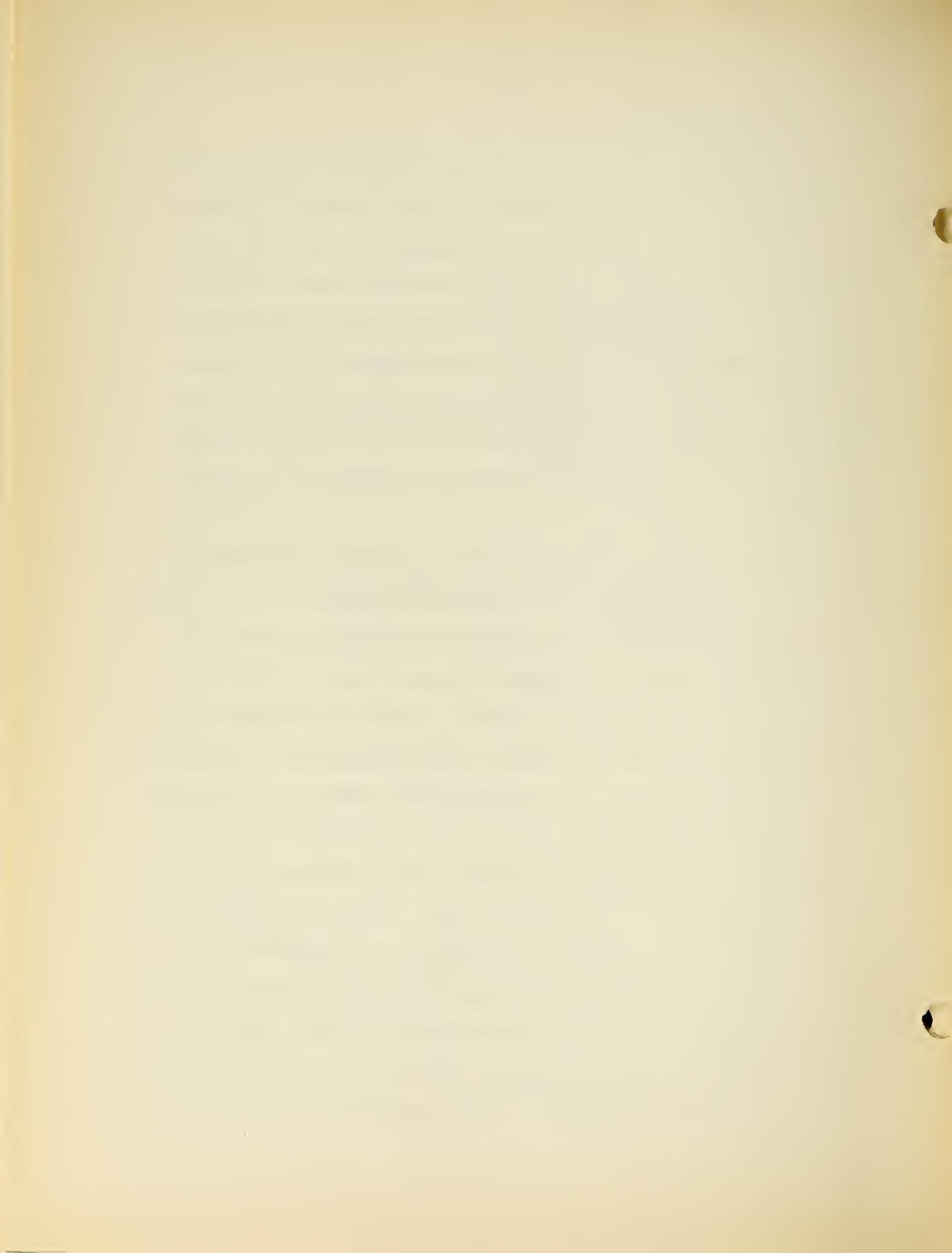
"Leonor de Guzman," marked Boker's return to the writing of tragedy. It was first played at the Walnut Street Theatre, October 3, 1853. The play was well received, and the following year was given even a better reception in New York. The scene of the play was laid in Castile at about the middle of the fourteenth century. The theme of the play was based upon the succession to the throne consequent upon the death of King Alfonso XII. Boker followed fairly closely the historical events connected with the actual happening, but at times he took certain liberties with history in order to make his work appealing. The character drawing in the play was extremely well done; Boker presenting the historical figures in a real,



true to life manner.

"Francesca da Rimini," Boker's masterpiece was written in 1853, during the brief period of three weeks. It was performed for the first time at the Broadway Theatre, New York, on September 26, 1855. The play was revived many times, and is the only American work of that period which has stood the test of time and is still played with success on the stage. There were several versions of the same theme, but none surpassed Boker's. He was the first to write a play in English on this theme. The following quotation adequately reviews the play.

"The character of Paolo, young, handsome, lovable, but a bit of a coxcomb, is contrasted through his own actions and words with Lanciotto, a warrior, misshapen in body but sensitive to a degree and with a love for his brother that embodies not only natural affection but also admiration for that physical perfection that has been denied him. Delicately too, does Boker depict that craving for affection on the part of a man no longer young, which when made concrete by being centered upon a young and beautiful woman, becomes one of the most real motives of life and of art. Francesca is introduced to us, not a mere receptive character as in Phillip's play or in Leigh Hunt's earlier narrative version, but alive and with a great capacity for love. She is ready to love Lanciotto, and when she mistakes his deputy Paolo, for him she gives her heart. Her girlish attempt to hide her pain, when she dis-



covers how she has been duped, is of the essence of drama, for  
the words seem rung out of her soul."<sup>1</sup>

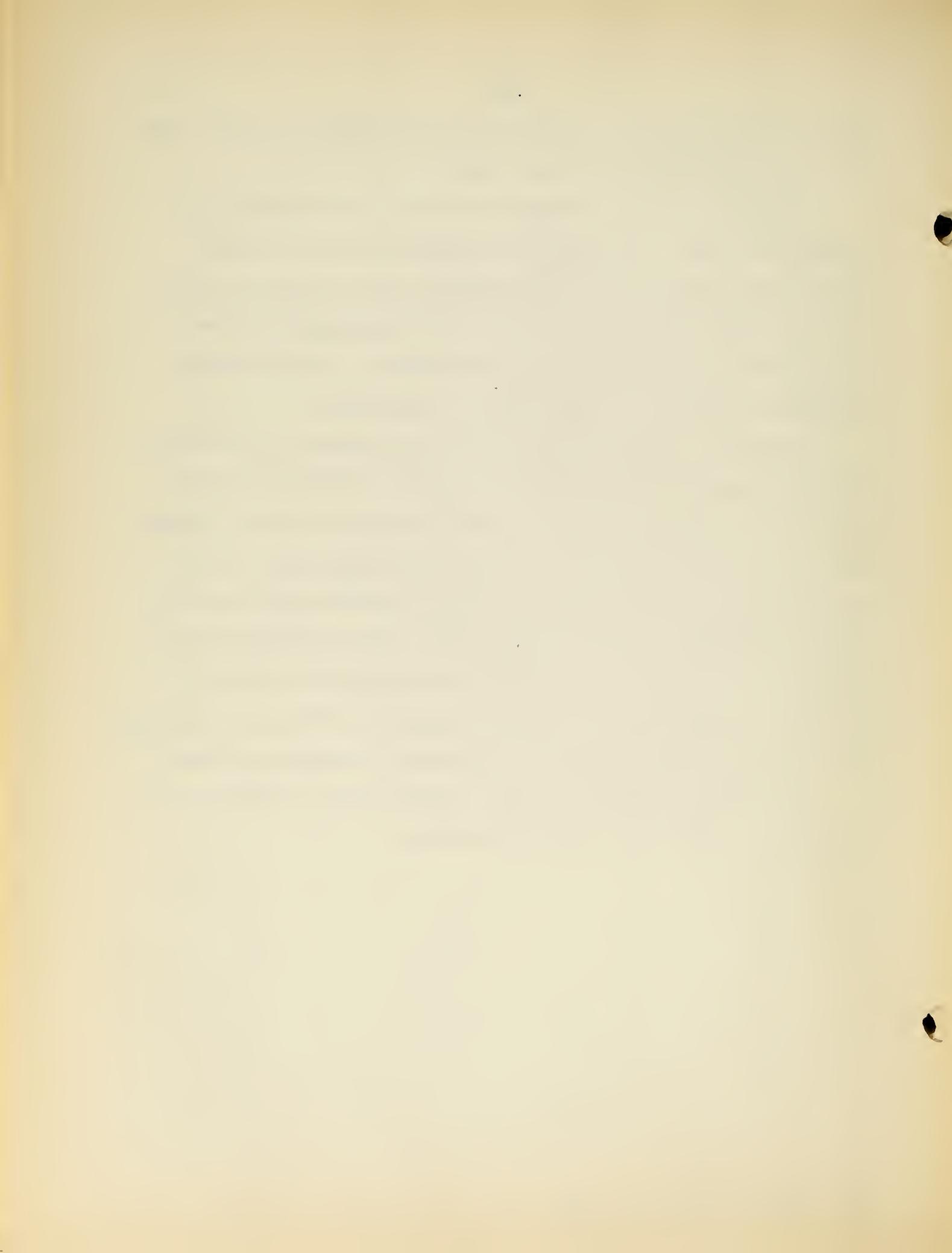
There were other individual efforts at the writing of romantic tragedy, but none could compare with those which Boker wrote, for he was richly endowed with the gift of play-writing which allowed him to write not merely good reading plays, but also those capable of production. Richard Henry Stoddard, a friend of Boker, said of his plays:

"That his tragedies were capable of effective representation was known to those of us who saw Mr. Davenport and Miss Dean in "Francesca da Rimini" years ago, and is known to those of us who have since seen Mr. Barrett and Miss Mainwright in the same play. The conception of his tragedies and comedies, their development, their movement, and their catastrophes are dramatic. Poetical, they are not overweighed with poetry; emotional and passionate, their language is naturally figurative,<sup>2</sup> and the blank verse rises and falls as the occasion demands."

With this discussion of the romantic play we conclude our treatment of the early drama in America.

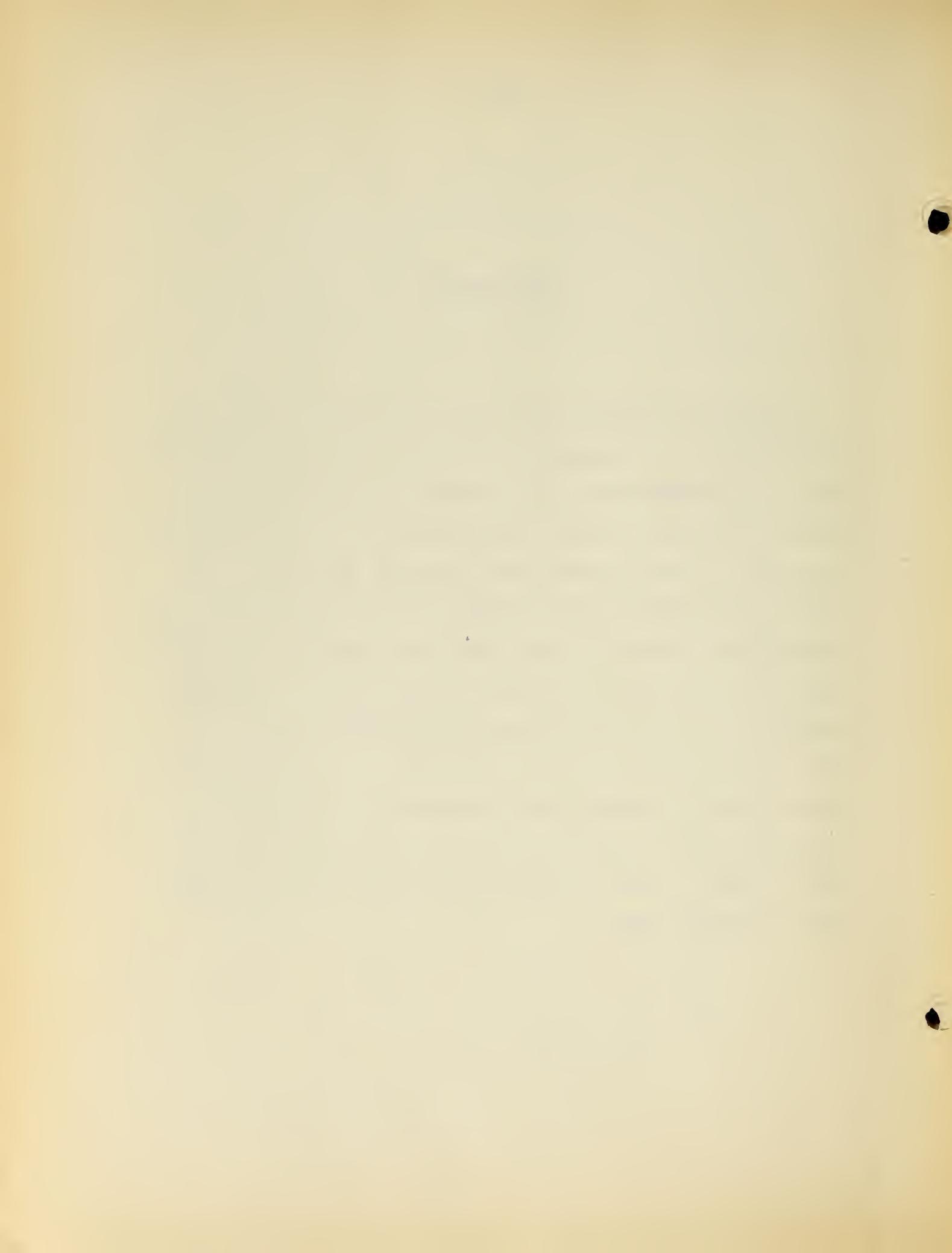
1. Quinn, p.353.

2. Hornblow, Vol. II, p.67



### Conclusion

The aim in writing this thesis, as was stated in the introduction, was to present a picture of the early American drama. The method used was to divide the early drama into periods, and then to select what appeared to be the outstanding events, as well as the most prominent writers, of each period. The achievements of these men were also considered, and notes on various of their works were set down. In this manner we endeavored to portray the early drama in America, and hope that the field has been sufficiently covered, at least to the extent, that the adherents to the cause of the modern drama in America, might glimpse the hardships and handicaps which the early writers and managers had to overcome in order to put the drama on the high plane of success which it enjoys today.



## Summary

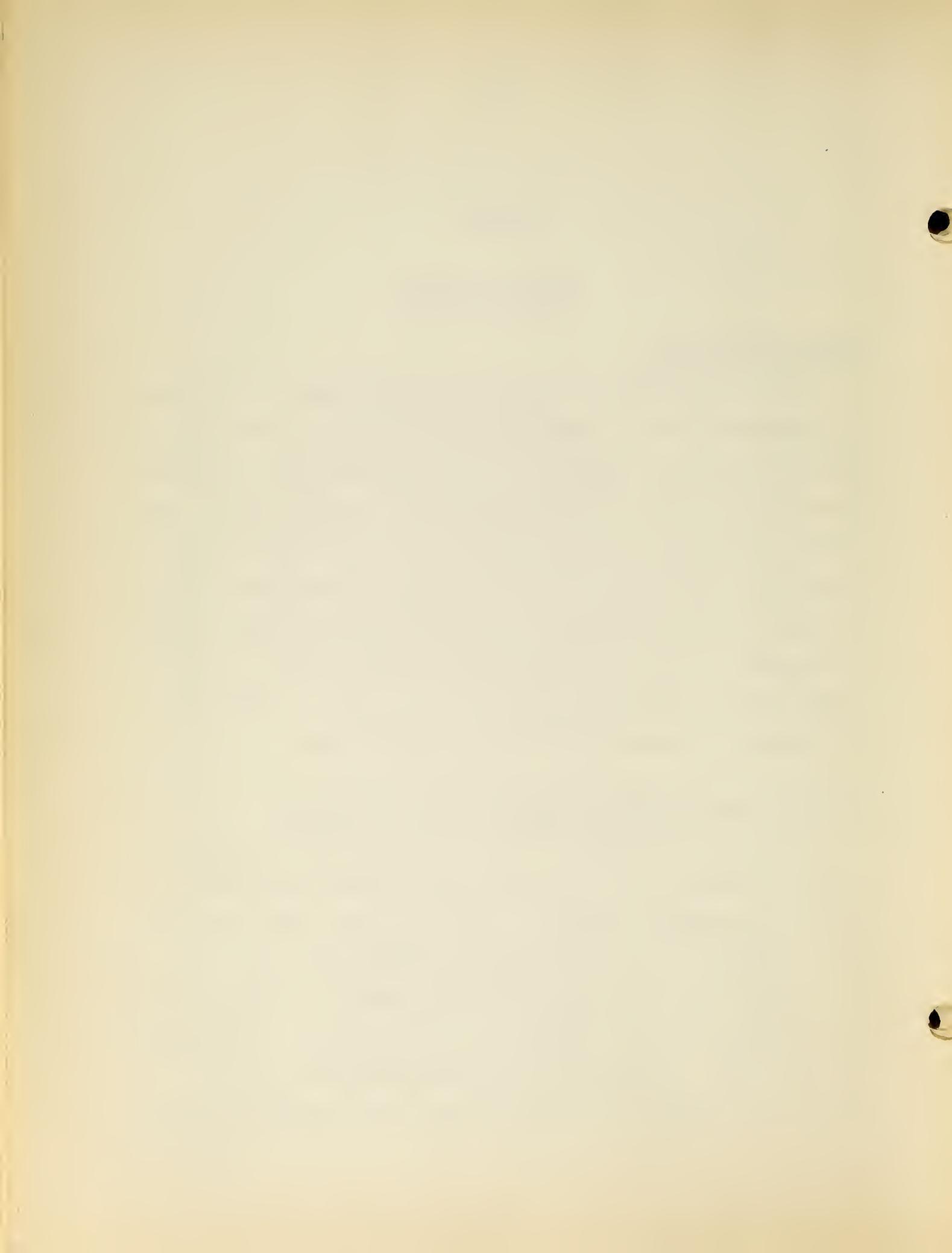
### Colonial Period

#### Social Conditions

There was, during the Colonial period, much wrangling as to whether or not the theatre was legitimate. The Puritans, the Huguenots, and the Quakers opposed the playhouse, whereas, the Catholics and the Episcopalians were in favor of it. The unsavory reputation of the theatre, which had descended from Restoration times, hurt the theatre in New England and Philadelphia. However, the Southerners disregarded precedent, and were unable to see why the theatre was illegitimate. The result of this difference of opinion was that no definite conclusion, in regard to the matter, was reached.

#### Hallam brings the American Company to Williamsburg

At about the middle of the eighteenth century, William Hallam, together with his brother Lewis Hallam organized a completely equipped company of actors and sent them from London to America. The company arrived at Yorktown, Virginia, in June of 1752, and having received permission to act, from the Governor, opened a theatre, in Williamsburg, in September of that year. The initial performance consisted of Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice," and a farce called "Lethe;"



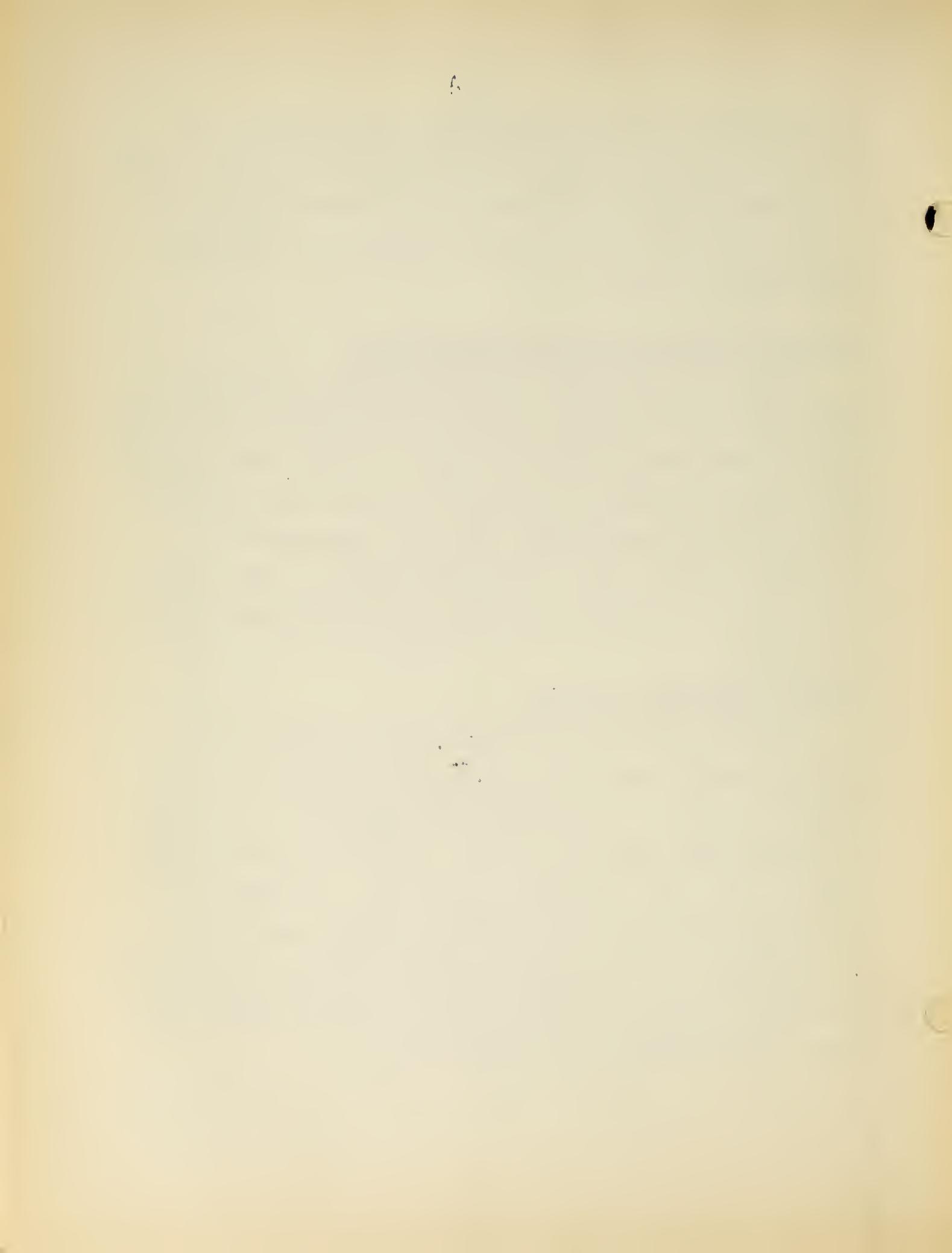
and also marked the first appearance of Lewis Hallam, Jr., who was to become a leading figure on the early American stage. The company acted throughout the country for many years, and did much toward putting the drama in America on a dignified and permanent footing.

The first permanent theatre in Philadelphia

This theatre was built by David Douglass, in 1766, on South Street above Fourth. It was called The Southwark Theatre, and was constructed of brick and wood. It was a great improvement over the temporary structures of the past, and remained in use for theatrical purposes until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Fire partly destroyed it in 1821. Some time later it was rebuilt, and was used for many years as a distillery.

Godfrey's "Prince of Parthia"

This was the first play written by an American to be produced upon the American stage by a professional company of actors. The author of the play, Thomas Godfrey Jr., was born in Philadelphia, December 4, 1736. He attended college, and later in life was a lieutenant in the army. In addition to his writing, Godfrey had also musical talents, and a taste for painting. He died, August 3, 1763. The play, itself, is a romantic tragedy, the scene of which is laid in Parthia, at about the beginning of the Christian era.



Drama of the Revolution

Whig and Tory use the drama

As the time for the outbreak of the Revolutionary war approached, the Whigs and the Tories gave vent to their political sentiment through the medium of dramatic satire. The Whigs expressed their patriotism to America and resentment against the actions of Great Britain and the Tories. The Tories, on the other hand, expressed their hatred of independence and their loyalty to the King. The leading writers of satirical plays, and their works, during this period, have been considered in the thesis.

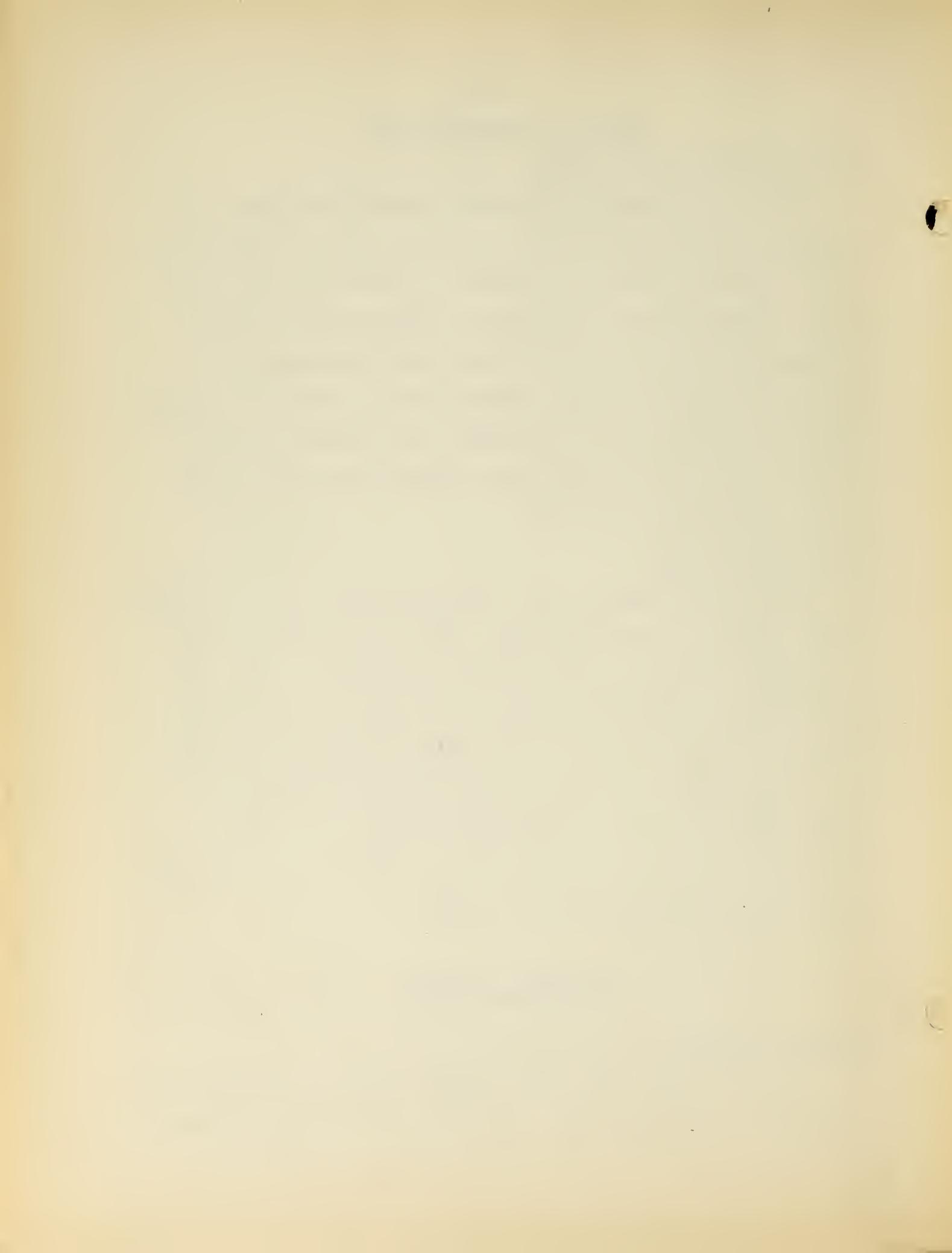
Mrs. Mercy Warren

Mrs. Warren was the most important writer during the period of political pamphleteering. She was the sister of the celebrated James Otis, and was born in Boston in 1728. In the effective handling of satire, Mrs. Warren had no peer. She was a strong advocate to the cause of the colonies, and was encouraged in her work by such men as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Mrs. Warren died in 1814. Her works, an account of which has been given in the thesis, were extremely bitter toward the cause of the Tories.

Transition Period

Coming of Comedy

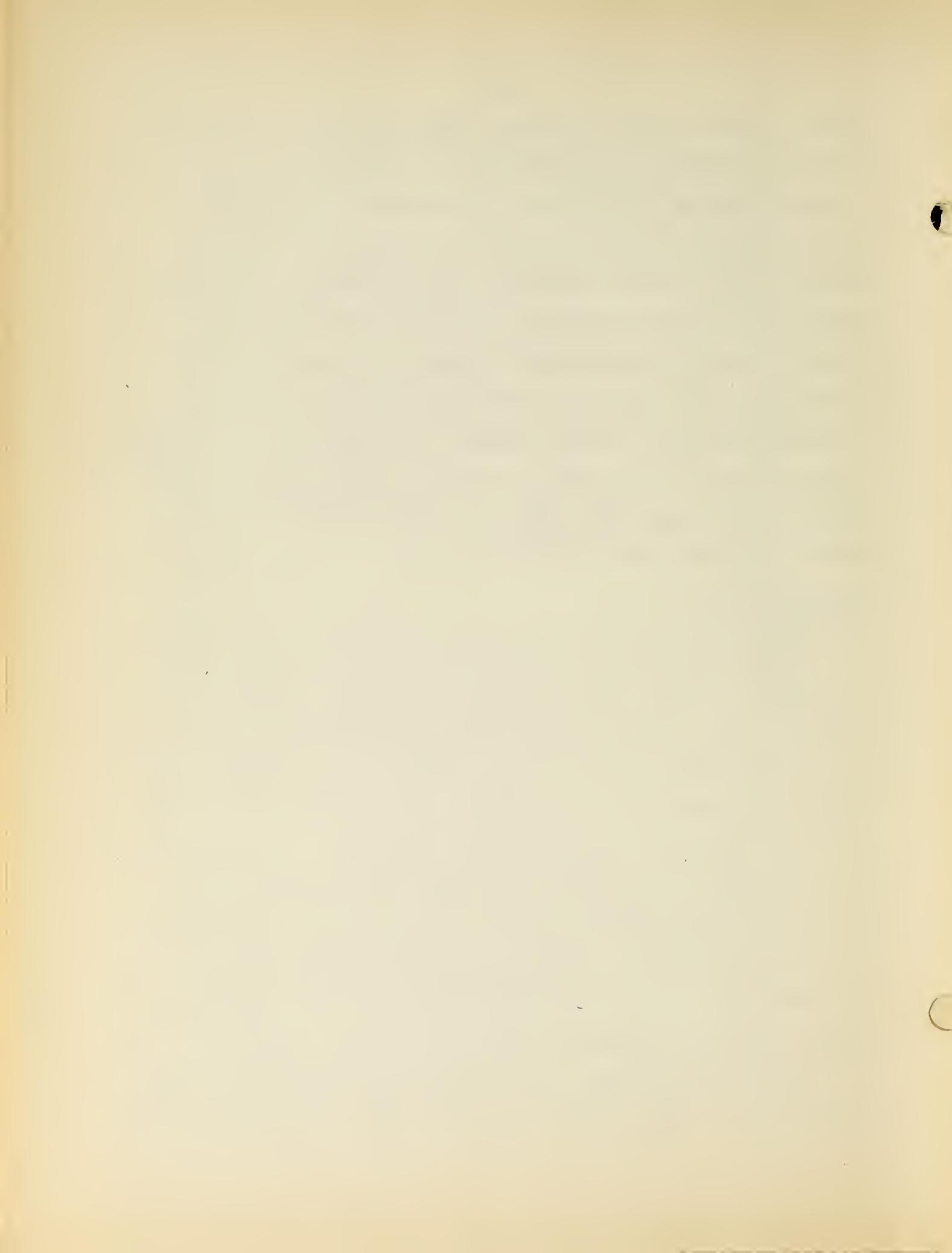
"The Contrast," the first comedy written in America, was produced on April 16, 1787. This play was written by Royall



Tyler. Tyler was born in Boston, July 18, 1757. He was educated at the Boston Latin School, and at Harvard. He also received degrees from Yale and the University of Vermont. After college he joined the army and attained the rank of Major. Tyler played a large part in the capture of the fugitives during Shay's Rebellion. Later in life he settled in Vermont, where he became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of that State. He died at Brattleboro on August 26, 1826. "The Contrast," was a great success. Although there was little genuine merit in the comedy of the play, it was liked because it was an American play. There was little excitement in the play, less plot, and no incident at all.

#### William Dunlap

Dunlap, whose name ranks with greatest in the history of the American drama, was born at Perth Amboy, New Jersey in February 1766. He had little regular education, but had a love for Shakespeare and Pope and the romance of history. In Europe he studied art under Benjamin West, but learned little in this field, preferring the theatre to study. As a youth he lost the sight of one eye, yet he saw a great deal of life. He was the first American man of letters who made the writing of plays a profession. Dunlap is remembered more for his qualities as a man, than for any real service he rendered the drama. He was an adaptor of other men's ideas, rather than an originator of his own. He died at Perth Amboy, New Jersey, in September, 1839. Notes on Dunlap's plays have been set down



in the thesis.

Political Drama

The treaty with England in 1794 and the refusal of the French government to receive Charles C. Pinckney, when he succeeded James Monroe as Minister of the United States to France in 1796, caused a great deal of dissension in this country. As a result patriotic and political drama became the vogue among the playwrights. The outstanding works of this post Revolutionary period have been noted in the thesis.

Period of 1805-1825

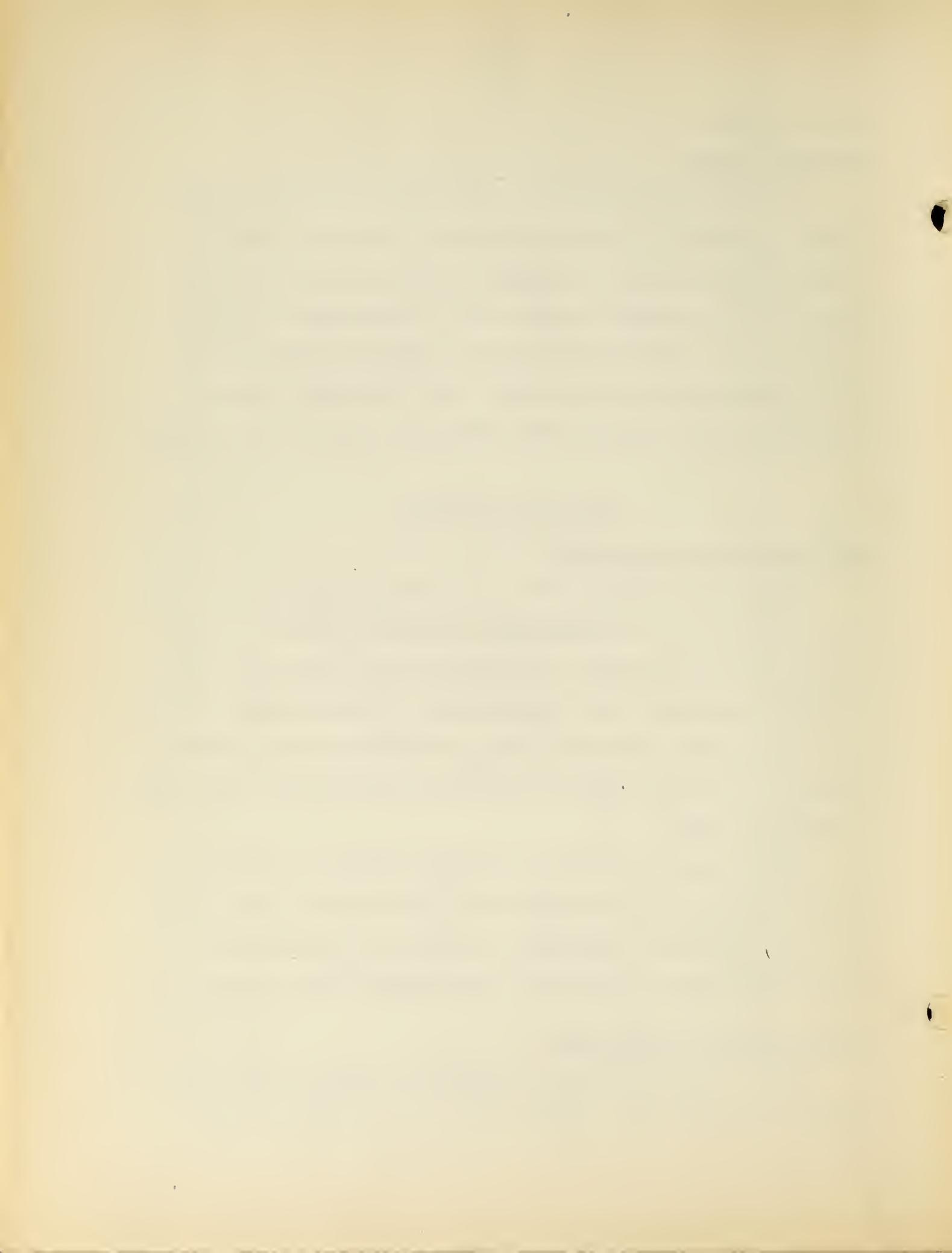
Barker and the native plays

Barker, the leading writer of American plays during this period, was born in Philadelphia on June 17, 1784. He was educated in Philadelphia, and was an officer during the war of 1812. In 1819 he was elected Mayor of Philadelphia. Later in life he became connected with the United States Treasury Department, in the employ of which he remained until his death on March 9, 1858.

Barker chose to write on American subjects because he felt the lack of native drama, and wished to do what he could to fill this lack. His plays, as well as those of other native play writers, have been considered in the thesis.

Payne and the foreign plays

Payne, the outstanding advocate of foreign themes, was born in New York City, June 9, 1791. At an early age he



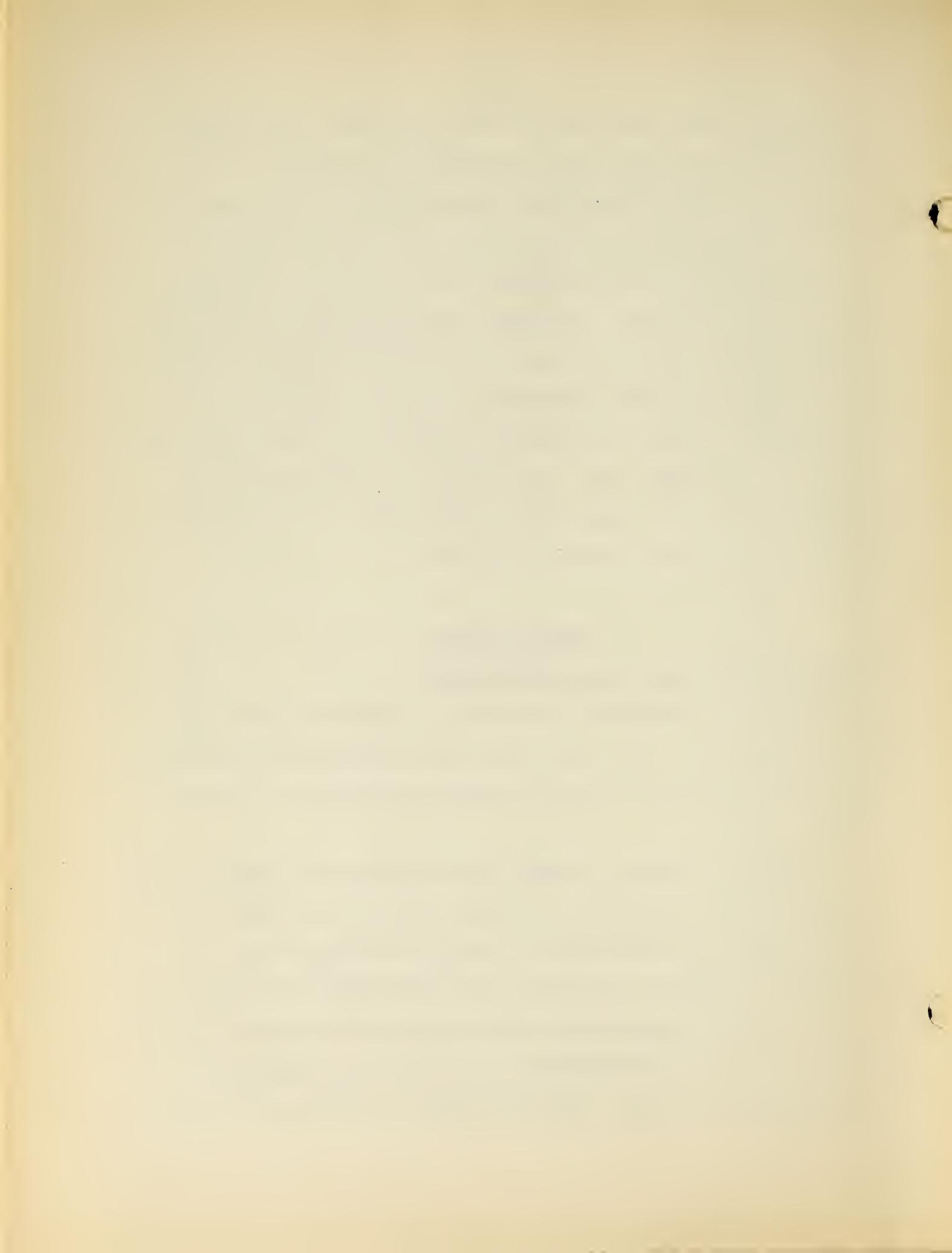
developed a love for drama and for journalism. He attended Union College in Schenectady, New York. He became an actor, in spite of family objections, and was extremely successful, both in America and in Europe. He wrote plays to abet the income he received from acting. Late in life he turned his attention to politics. President Tyler appointed him to the consulship of Tunis, at which post he died on April 9, 1852. In 1883 his body was transferred to America, with national honor, and was buried at Oak Hill Cemetery, in Washington, on June 9, of the same year. His plays, and others based on foreign themes, and their authors, and dates of production, were previously set down in the thesis.

#### Romantic Drama

##### Bird and the rise of the romantic play

The term "romantic" has been in a literary sense, used in various ways. The term really means freedom from restraint. The writer chooses his theme without restriction of place or time.

The chief writer of early romantic plays was Robert Bird, who was born in Newcastle, Delaware, February 5, 1806. He was raised in an atmosphere of culture and refinement. He received a degree in medicine, but after practicing for a short time he abandoned the profession in favor of literature. He gave up active playwriting because of his disappointment at financial returns. The latter part of his life was taken



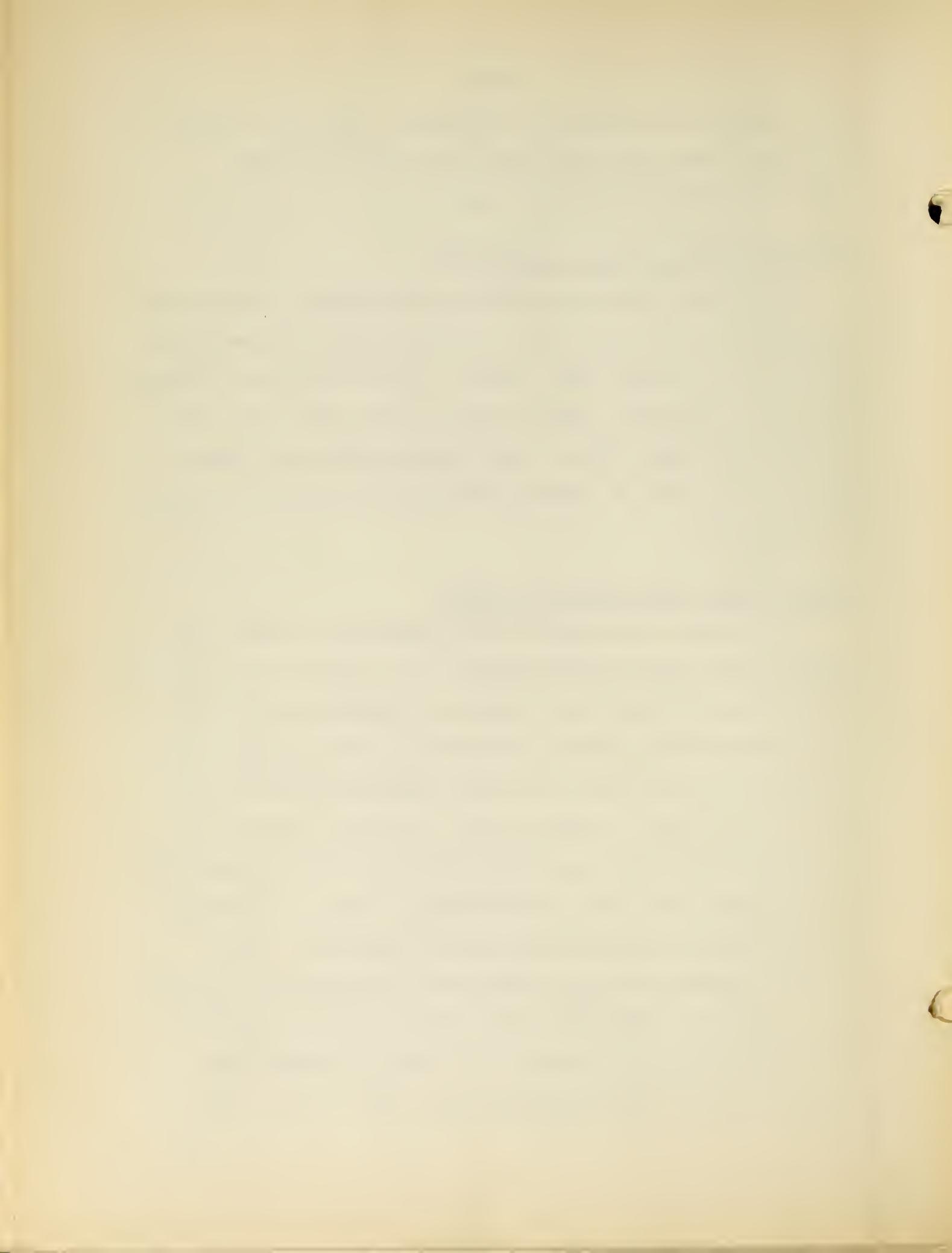
up by farming, journalism, and politics. He died, January 23, 1854. Bird wrote many plays, the most successful of which have been noted in the thesis.

#### The Philadelphia group of playwrights

The rivalry between theatres in Philadelphia encouraged a group of men to write plays. The best work was done in the field of the romantic play, usually with its roots in history, ancient and medieval. Among these writers were: Dr. James McHenry, David Paul Brown, John Augustus Stone, and Robert T. Conrad. The works of these men have been previously discussed in the thesis.

#### Boker and the later romantic tragedy

Until about the middle of the nineteenth century, the romantic play voiced protest against the aristocracy. However, at this time it turned in a different direction and in the work of one of our greatest dramatists we find depicted the tragedy of the patrician. This playwright was George Henry Boker, who was born in Philadelphia, October 6, 1823. He received his education in private schools, and at the College of New Jersey. In 1844, he married Miss Riggs. He studied law but never practiced preferring to devote his time to writing. Besides writing, Boker was also interested in politics. He was at different times, United States Minister to both Constantinople and Russia. He died in Philadelphia, January 2, 1890. The thesis contains notes on his works.



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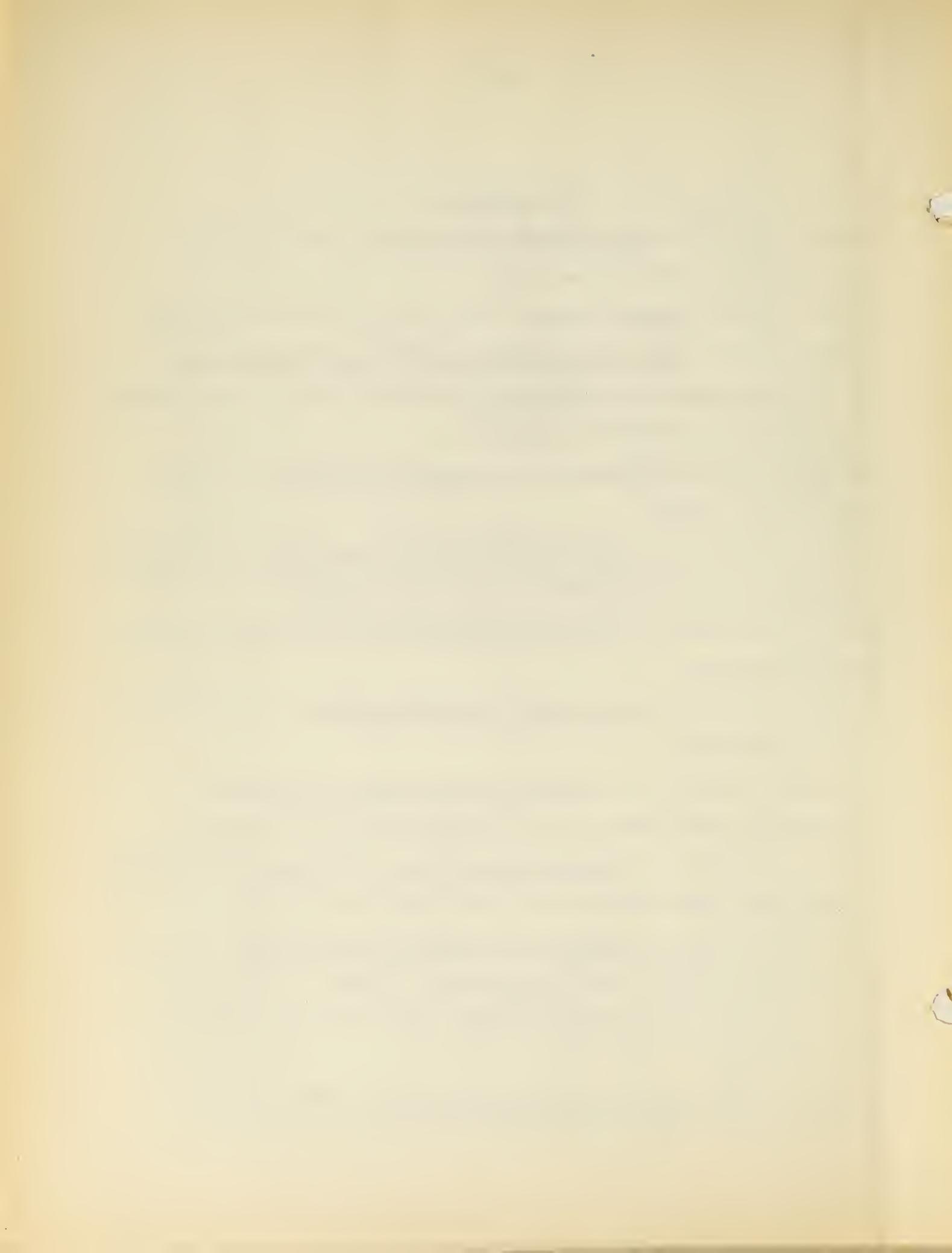
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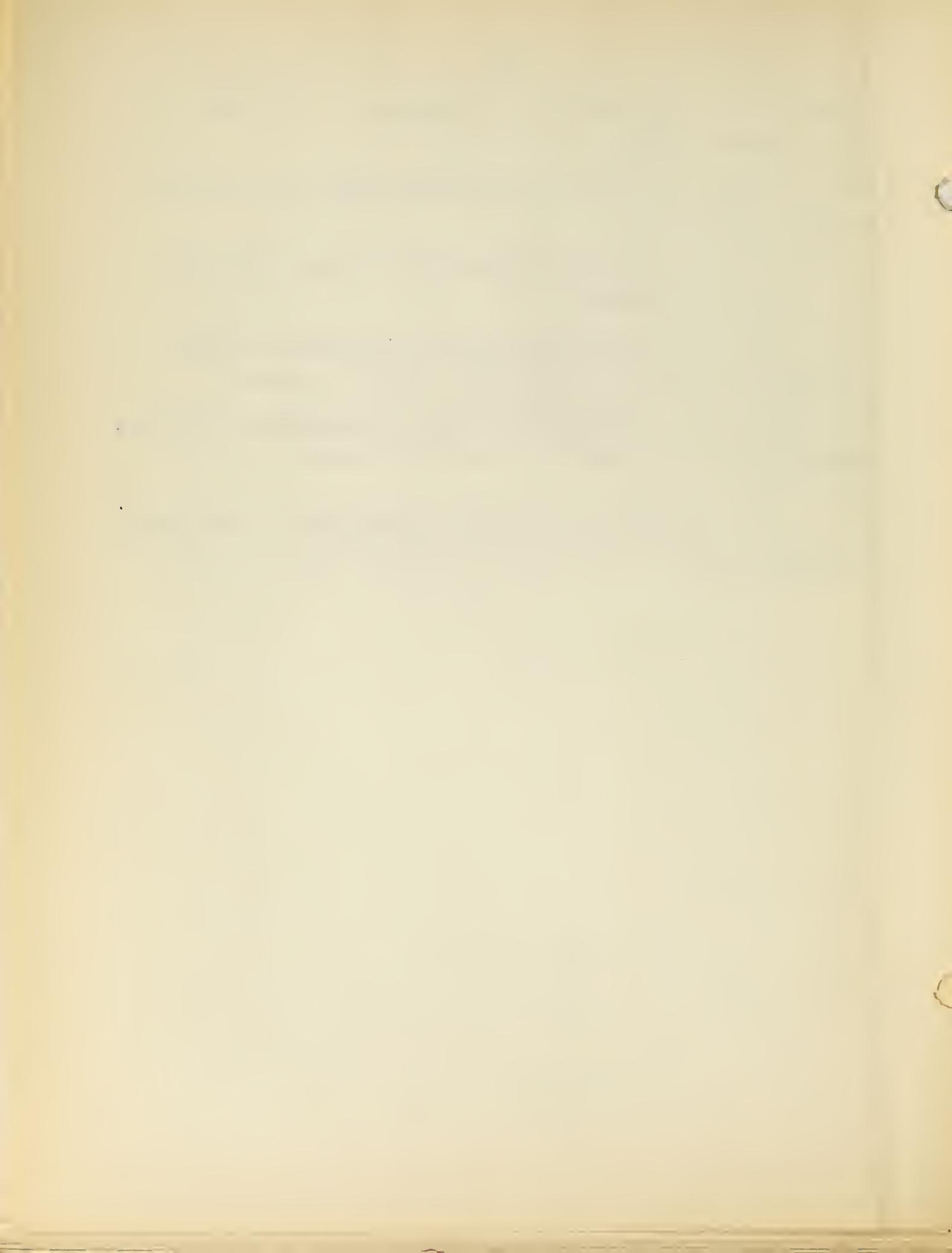
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